Landscape and Poetry

A study of Nature in Classical Tamil Poetry

Xavier S. Thani Nayagam

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Foreward

Xavier S. THANI NAYAGAM ADIGAL, an eminent scholar of Tamil is one of the founder secretary of the International Institute of Tamil Studies.

We are proud to reprint his book Landscape and poetry published in 1966. We have already published collected papers of Tahni Nayagam Adigal. This book contains articles on various aspect of nature as discribed the classical Tamil poetry.

We express our sincere thanks to DR. M. TAMILKUDIMAGAN Hon'ble Minister for Tamil Official Language and Culture and Thiru. V. Palanichamy, I.A.S. Secretary for Tamil Development and Culture Dept. for their constant encouragement given for the development of this Institute.

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INTRODUCTION

THE ANCIENT LITERATURE of the Tamils, like the literature of the ancient Greeks, impresses one not so much by the bulk, range and variety of the works that have been preserved for us, as by the comparative novelty and compelling nature of its contents, and by the light that it throws on the hoary and characteristic culture of the southern part of Peninsular India. What Goethe said of literature in general is also true of Tamil. "Literature is a fragment of a fragment; of all that ever happened or has been said, but a fraction has been written, and of this but little is extant".[1] With Greek and Latin, Tamil shares the misfortune of having lost the vast portion of its ancient literature, but while Greek and Latin have yet their dramas, epics, and historical, philosophical and forensic prose, it is almost exclusively the lyric and heroic and bardic poetry of ancient Tamil that has survived. Yet what has escaped the ravages of time, though not even a hundredth of the actual output,[2] reveals elements so original and fresh in the history of literature, and throws such new light on the history of a portion of the world, that to study the literary features of ancient literature or to describe the world as it was at the age of Aśoka, or Alexander, or Augustus, it would not be sufficient to take count only of Greek and Latin, and Sanskrit and Chinese. It would be necessary to consider Tamil as well.

During the last two centuries some European scholar or other of nearly every generation has paid Tamil the tribute

[1] GOETHE quoted in *The New Dictionary of Thoughts*, subject *Literature*, New York, 1936.

[2] On the antiquity and extent of ancient Tamil literature, see K. S. SRINIVASA PILLAI, *History of Tamil* (Tm), pp. 1-41, Madras, 1922; T. R. SESHA IYENGAR, *Dravidian India*, pp. 79 ff, and 166 ff, Madras, 1925; K. N. SIVARAJA PILLAI, *The Chronology of the Early Tamils*, Madras, 1932; A. CHIDAMBARANATHA CHETTIAR, *Advanced Studies in Tamil Prosody*, Annamalainagar, 1943, in which the antiquity may be examined from a new angle, namely, prosody. On the characteristics of ancient Tamil Poetry, see SWAMI VEDACHALAM, *Ancient and Modern Tamil Poets*, Pallavaram, 1939.

of a sigh,[3] and insisted that Western scholarship ought not neglect it, but even so, all the interest that has been created has only resulted in some stray compliment paid in legendary language, "In the South of India there is an ancient language with an ancient literature." Tamil has not had its Max Müllers, Macdonells, Keiths and Winternitzes and even these have unwittingly prolonged Western neglect of Tamil because by identifying Indian literature with Sanskrit literature, they have created the belief that Sanskrit literature is both exclusively and exhaustively representative of Ancient Indian Culture. Max Müller wrote about what India can teach the West. By India he meant the Indo-Gangetic plain. The Kaaveeri delta has interesting lessons too.

While it is given to the student of comparative literature to trace the origins of Sanskrit literature in the hymns of the Vedas, and the early attempts of the Grecian bards in the Homeric poems, of the origins of Tamil literature, he can find little trace or historical account. The earliest book extant is *Tolkaappiyam*, and that book argues the existence of numberless grammarians, a large literature, and years of anterior literary culture.[4] Even by the most rigid canons, the date of its

[3] Beschi, Ellis, Bower, Caldwell, Pope. Dr. Winslow writes in the preface to his *Tamil-English Dictionary* (Madras, 1862): "It is not perhaps extravagant to say that in its poetic form the Tamil is more polished and exact than the Greek and in both dialects, with its borrowed treasures, more copious than the Latin". Dr. Schimid: "The mode of collocating its words follows the logical or intellectual order more so than even the Latin or Greek". "Although the very ancient, copious and refined Tamil language is inferior to none, it is regarded by most people as the (probably barbarous) vernacular of a people living somewhere in a remote district. Neither does our Indian Government nor do our Universities (British) fully recognize the value of Tamil literature; and so those who spend their lives in seeking for pearls under water". Dr. G. U. POPE in *Tamilian Antiquary*, No. 6, p. 3, Madras, 1910. Scholars as those mentioned above, well versed in European classical literatures, would have been impressed far more if the Cankam literature available to the present generation had been available to them. Max Müller in *Prefatory note to Hindu Manners and Customs*, "Tamil Literature hitherto has been far too much neglected by students of Indian literature, philosophy and religion."

[4] This is fairly clear from the nature of *Tolkaappiyam* which codified already existing literature and grammar.

composition cannot be fixed later than the third century before Christ.[5] It is this book which gives the scholar a wealth of material for the study of the social life and literary conventions of the Tamils of the half millennium preceding the Christian era. As such, the third part of the book, which deals with the functions, the matter, and the mode of poetics, *Porulatikaaram*, is the first and fundamental source for the study of Nature in ancient Tamil literature. It describes the conventions which regulate the two-fold classification of Tamil poetry, namely, "Love poetry and all that is not love poetry" (Akam, Puṛam), the landscape, the seasons, the hours appropriate to each aspect and emotion of love; the trees and flowers which are symbolic of different landscapes or strategic movements; in short, how Nature is to be framed as the background of human behaviour and emotions in poetry. The poetry belonging to the age before and immediately after the composition of *Tolkaappiyam* has not come down to us. What have reached us are the *Ten Idylls* (Pattuppaaṭṭu) and the Eight Anthologies (Eṭṭuttokai) which are collections of poems composed after *Tolkaappiyam* by various poets, most of whom belonged to one single epoch. Most of this poetry was composed before the second century A.D.[6]

These poems, however, do not exactly belong to a Golden or Augustan Age of Tamil literature as has been supposed. Indications point to their being the efforts of an age when decades of convention were setting limits and marking boundaries to poetic inspiration, and preventing the free and unfettered beat of the poets' wings. Nevertheless, it is a great and spacious age in Tamil literature.

5 In addition to the works mentioned see SIMON CASIE CHITTY, *The Tamil Plutarch*, Colombo, 1946. In the note (p. 122) under the title "Tolkaappiyanaar," T. P. MEENAKSHISUNDARAM dates the work as anterior to third century B.C. Later interpolations are not ruled out.

6 DR. U. V. SAMINATHA IYER, *Kuruntogai* (Tm) Introduction, p. 8 ff, 2 ed., Madras, 1947. PIERRE MEILE, in *Histoire des Littératures*, Vol. I, p. 1046 ff, Paris, 1955.

7 S. KRISHNASWAMY IYENGAR in the *Tamilian Antiquary*, No. 5, Trichinopoly, 1909, writes of this period as *The Augustan Age of Tamil Literature*. The phrase has been often used since then by writers on Tamil literature.

These poems present faithful portraits of the social, economic, political, and literary state of the Tamil country, the two centuries before and after Christ. A good portion of the literary legislation of *Tolkaappiyam* regarding Nature as the background of poetry is illustrated by these poems. The *Tolkaappiyam* and these poems which collectively are often referred to as *Cankam Literature*, are the texts used for the present study.[8]

The *Ten Idylls* contain lengthy and picturesque descriptions of the Tamil country and its seasons. Most of them are in the form of *Aarruppatai*, a literary device by which a bard or a minstrel who has received bountiful gifts from some wealthy patron is supposed to direct another to the same Maecenas.[9] This gives the occasion to the poet, among other topics, to describe in great detail the natural beauty, fertility, and resources of the territory which has to be traversed to reach the palace of the patron. These poems which are in the nature of guide-books and travelogues adopt a more credible and realistic device than those Tamil poems of a later age which utilize inanimate objects like the cloud and the wind as messengers or the media of poetic observation. The *Aarruppatai* is of a piece with Tamil realism and describes the journey as experienced by a human traveller, and that on *terra firma*.

Each of the *Ten Idylls* contains passages relevant to the theme of Nature. The first poem on the god, Murukan, contains descriptions of the natural beauty of spots most beloved by him, of his immanent presence in Nature, and of the flowers, trees and animals sacred to him. Minute and interesting des-

[8] T. 1037, see General Introduction of *Pattuppaattu* translated by J. V. Chelliah, Colombo. V. R. Ramachandra Dikshithar, *Studies in Tamil Literature and History*, 1946, pp. 21-85, London, 1930.

[9] The term "Cankam literature" is very widely used among the Tamils to designate their ancient books written prior to, say, the third century of the Christian era. The word Cankam here stands for 'Literary Academy' and these books are the works of poets who lived at a period when the activities of a literary body regulated and set the standards for Tamil literature. The persistent Tamil tradition speaks of three academies, the first two of which were succeeded by geological upheavals that caused the loss also of the literature of those epochs. What has remained are mostly the books of the third epoch or of the third academy, and now "Cankam" has by degrees come to mean *par excellence* the third academy and the third epoch.

criptions of the hill country, of the dawn and the setting in of evening, and of the close life of the people with Nature, occur in *Malaipaṭukaṭaam,* and Kapilar's famous *Kuriñcippaaṭṭu.* Few passages can rival the description of the North Wind and its effects, and the interplay of human emotions and sentiments as found in *Neṭunalvaaṭai.* The conventional regions of the Cooḷa and Paaṇṭiya kingdoms, the *Kaaveeri* and *Vaiyai* which water them, and regional fusion (tiṇai mayakkam) are faithfully portrayed in the other poems which are intentionally panegyric. The greatness of a sovereign was assessed also by the fertility and the diversity of regions found within his kingdom and, therefore, descriptions of the landscapes of the territory of a sovereign often form an integral part of laudatory and heroic verse.

The Eight Anthologies are classified again according to the subjects treated, namely, into *Akam* and *Puṛam.* This is a fundamental division in Tamil poetry, and is made on the basis of psychological and psychic experience. *Akam* is a word denoting "interior" as opposed to *Puṛam* which means the "exterior". Under *Akam* poetry comes what is supposed to be the most internal, personal, and directly incommunicable human experience, and that is love and all its emotional phases. All that does not come under this internal and interior experience is classed as *Puṛam.* While love poetry is *Akam,* all the other poetry, elegiac, panegyric and heroic is *Puṛam.* In *Puṛam* poetry, the study of Nature is mainly objective and consists in similes and metaphors, whereas in *Akam* poetry Nature is the background and sympathetic stage for the emotional and aesthetic aspects of love. There is in Tamil love poetry much of the sympathetic interpretation of Nature whereby Nature is brought into relationship with man, furnishing lessons and analogies to human conduct and human aspirations, and expressing itself in sympathy with or in antagonism to the lives of men. The *Puṛanaanuuṛu,* and the *Patiṛruppattu* which belong to the *Puṛam* category do not entertain certain elements of the interpretation of Nature, which, on the other hand, are considered to be vital to the *Kali* odes, the *Ainkuṛunuuṛu,* the *Kuṛuntokai,* the *Naṛṛiṇai,* and the *Neṭuntokai* or *Akanaanuuṛu.*

An abundance of similes and metaphors regarding Nature, and exquisite touches of suggestion, are to be found in the *Puranaanuuru* and *Patirruppattu.* Some of the poems in the former collection may be easily classed among some of the best of Nature poetry in world literature. But the poetry of the *Akam* collections introduces, in addition, an outlook which is foreign to other literatures. It has been the object of writers like Humboldt, Ruskin, Biese and Palgrave to regard the ancient and modern world, when looked at from the standpoint of the poetic interpretation of Nature, as "one great confederation". Though the study of ancient Tamil literature confirms this view in a general way, it also shows that in a corner of Peninsular India, a people developed an interpretation of Nature the like of which was not conceived on the plains watered by the Ganges, or on the banks of the Nile or the Tiber, or on the shores of the Aegean Sea.

The *Kali* odes, so-called because of the *Kali* metre employed in their composition, are extremely rich in figures of speech and in a keen observation of Nature. They contain apostrophes supposed to be made by lovers to such objects as the cloud, the wind, the moon and the sea, but the most precious part of the poems of the anthology are the highly artistic expressions of feminine love sentiment. The *Paripaatal,* another anthology consisting of long odes of a special metre and meant to be sung to the accompaniment of stringed instruments, consists partly of devotional odes to Murukan and Tirumaal, and partly of poems exclusively on the Vaiyai river and the water-sports connected with the festival celebrated around its annual freshes after the monsoon rains. The natural scenery in which the religious shrines are located are praised in a devotee's language of love and rapture in the devotional odes, while the odes on the Vaiyai contain abundant descriptions of the birth of the river, and its rapid and sometimes devastating progress amidst scenes of natural loveliness. They contain also protestations of almost a human affection on the part of the poets for the river that confers beauty, fertility and prosperity to the city and the kingdom of Maturai.

The other four books are anthologies of love poems, alike in subject and metre, but different only in length. The *Netun-*

tokai consists of poems of thirteen to twenty-one lines, the *Narrinai* of poems of nine to twelve lines and the *Kuruntokai* of poems from four to eight lines. The *Ainkurunuuru* also consists of similar poems of three to six lines, but forms a separate anthology since it is divided into a hundred poems on each region. Though human emotions form the primary subject of these anthologies, it is the human emotions of a people who lived in intimate relationship and communion with Nature. The shorter the poem the more intense is its suggestiveness regarding Nature; the longer the poem the more detailed is the description of Nature, and the more explicit the avowal of the mutual influence between Man and Nature. While human passions in these poems are suggested in a few lines, it is the description of the landscapes and the natural setting appropriate to these passions which are described at length. Many of these poems are landscapes in verse. It looks as if the Tamil poets had a tradition of writing on the same theme verses of different length, for it is easy to trace an idea embodied in a couplet of Tiruvalluvar in an expanded form in a poem of *Kuruntokai,* and yet more diffuse in *Netuntokai,* and with minute and elaborate details in, say, *Netunalvaatai.*

There is, therefore, no dearth of material for a study on the poetic and philosophic interpretation of Nature in ancient Tamil poetry. The mediaeval commentators of *Tolkaappiyam* and the Cankam Classics have rendered this task easier by their illustrations and exegesis. To such names as Naccinaarkiniyar, and Ilampuuranar, and Parimeelalahar, must be added also the names of modern editors, the prince among whom is the late Dr. Swaminatha Iyer, whose introductions and *apparatus criticus* render great aid to the student engaged in Tamil research. The difficulty for the student is rather the *embaras de choix.* There is such an abundance of material that to select, collate and make the subject presentable and readable to those whose acquaintance with Tamil literature is scant, is not a light task. The flora and fauna, the very hills and localities mentioned in Cankam literature have yet to be explored and identified. Literary criticism of Tamil poetry is a new field of study, for histories of Tamil literature have until recently been preoccupied with disputes regarding chronology, and

with proving or disproving the veracity of fabulous accounts that have grown around literary origins and lives of poets.

The books which I have found to treat in a satisfactory manner the concept of Nature among the ancient Tamils, are P. T. Srinivas Iyengar's *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture* and *History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to A.D.* 600.[10] The author's main sources for the history of that period are the very ones which are the texts for the present study. He has studied them to some extent from the historical angle. It now remains to examine them from the point of view of the literary critic and the literary historian. Professor M. Varadarajan in his book *The Treatment of Nature in Sangam Literature* has made a detailed and comprehensive analysis of the texts concerned.[11] For a book intended for foreign readers on this subject, I have paid greater attention to *Akam* poetry as revealing the more original aspects of Nature poetry in Tamil. It has not been my intention to crowd into this study abundant details, or make it heavy reading with a multitude of quotations, and reference to single objects of Nature as mountains, rivers, trees, flowers, animals, or single forces of Nature, as lightning and thunder.

Where other literatures are concerned, ancient and modern, this province of literary criticism has attracted a satisfactory number of scholars. While there have been several works on the interpretation of Nature of individual poets like Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Shelley, or the entire literature of single nations, world literature itself has been the subject of research in this interesting aspect. Schiller led the study with his *Über die naive und sentimentale Dichtung* (1794), followed by Alexander von Humboldt, who in his *Kosmos*, a work of encyclopaedic information, discussed Nature in the poetry and landscape painting of the Indo-European races. Ruskin in the third volume of *Modern Painters* has interpreted the Nature of Landscape art in classical, mediaeval and modern times.

[10] The author makes several useful observations which if developed will contribute greatly to Tamil research. His chronology, however, is debatable. His book is referred to as H.T. in these pages.

[11] These pages were written before the publication of M. Varadarajan's *The Treatment of Nature in Sangam Literature*, Madras, 1957.

Victor de Laprade's two studies, *Le sentiment de la nature avant le Christianisme* and *chez les modernes* are bold and masterly surveys by a critic of refined thought. Comparative literature received very adequate and comprehensive treatment in the studies of Alfred Biese, who in his two works covered the whole field from the Homeric poems to the Romantic School of the Nineteenth Century, *Die Entwickelung des Naturgefühls bei den Griechen und den Römern* (1884) and *Die Entwickelung des Naturgefühls im Mittelalter und in der Neuzeit.* Francis Turner Palgrave came next with his work on *Landscape in Poetry from Homer to Tennyson,* and John Campbell Shairp with his *Poetic Interpretation of Nature* in which may be found studies of Homer, Lucretius, Vergil, Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. None of these works contains even a single reference to ancient Tamil literature, though the Vedic hymns and Kālidāsa come in for some little comment.

The reader will probably feel at the end of this work, if he will peruse it to the end, that Nature as studied, described, and embodied by the ancient Tamil poets, contains features not in the least negligible in a study of comparative literature, and that the works of Humboldt and Biese would have been more complete, and the studies of Laprade and Shairp richer and more accurate, if Tamil Cankam literature had been available to the authors at least in translations.[12]

[12] See the English translation of *Pattuppaattu* by J. V. Chelliah, o.c. Dr. G. U. Pope, has translated some poems of the *Puranaanuuru* in the *Tamilian Antiquary,* No. 6, pp. 45-77, Madras, 1910. The *Tolkaappiyam Porulatikaaram* has been translated with a commentary by Varadharaja Aiyer, Annamalainagar, 1948, and P. S. Subrahmanya Sastri (see Bibliography).

Both Varadharaja Aiyer and P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, o.c., have translated into English numerous poems in their texts but there is yet room for improvement in the diction of the translations. Dr. Kamil Zvelebil of Prague has published an anthology of Ancient Tamil Poetry in Czech.

Plants are identified in this book generally on the basis of Burrow and Emeneau's *Dravidian Etymological Dictionary.*

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND

The Land

The influence of Geography in determining the character and culture of a people, or, in short, what has been called since Graebner "Anthropo-geography" (the relation between culture and environment), and in our days as Human Geography, is a science which neither the ethnologist nor the literary critic can afford to neglect.[1] The cold dark winters of the polar regions are said to be inimical to the spirit of activity, vigilance and criticism. The gloom of geographical uniformity combined with a harsh climate imposes a spirit of resignation and acquiescence that saps initiative and lames resource. Even comparatively minor differences of landscape as between two contiguous districts of the same country, say Tuscany and Umbria, are manifest in the different artistic outlook of the painters who come from these two districts. It has been also observed, for instance, that monotheism is characteristic of religions which have originated in the desert, and polytheism of cults where Nature is diversified and luxuriant. Similarly, it has been argued, that the vast Himālayan Range, the broad plains that seem to have no horizon watered by rivers which in their mighty expanse seem to have no shores setting limits to them, the tropical forests with their various living creatures, were instrumental in the evolution of Vedic poetry and the sense of wonder and the sense of the Infinite these poems reveal and these natural causes inspired. Man was faced with a uniform sense of the Infinite on all sides; it seemed to overwhelm him, and there was no other alter-

[1] Cf. Graebner, *Methode der Ethnologie*, Heidelberg, 1911; W. Schmidt, *The Culture Historical Method of Ethnology* (translation from the German), New York, 1939; E. Huntington, *Main-springs of Civilization*, New York, 1959.

native but to let oneself be absorbed in the Infinite through the medium of contemplation and ecstasy.[2]

Greece, on the other hand, affords an example of quite a different kind of landscape originating quite a contrary spirit in man. Greece is a beautifully diversified country, with promontories looking out on the many-islanded Aegean, with a canopy of sky that lends colour and light to land and sea. The broken dentured Grecian coast curving into innumerable gulfs, its small rivers, and low hills of exquisite outline, its several territories closely knit with one another, were easily accessible to human conquest. There was nothing to awe the Greeks. "The wine dark sea" murmurs around Greece, unlike the roar of the ocean around India. Even Ossa and Pelion and Olympus are small when compared with the gigantic snow-capped ranges of the Himālayas; and whole Grecian kingdoms might be swallowed up in the mouths of Indian rivers. In such a country, man was free to evolve a spirit of independence and conquest and liberty. The Greek's sense of the Infinite proceeded from within, while that of the Indian was forced on him from without.[3]

Similarly, the physical texture of the South Indian landscape with its dividing mountains and rivers and its clearly defined contours, gave the South of India not only an occasion for its small kingdoms and smaller chieftaincies, but also formed the basis for the division of poetry on geographical regions as for example "mountain poetry", "pasture-land poetry" and "seaside poetry".

Tamil poetry has all the marks of being indigenous to the Tamil soil. It is tantamount to saying that Tamil poetry contains no indication of the Tamil people having come from some foreign abode with a language and literature already developed. By the Tamil soil, must be meant, not only the present linguistic Tamil zone, but all the land between the Tirupati hills and Cape Comorin and between the Western Sea and the

2 DE REINCOURT AMAURY, *The Soul of India*, p. 15 ff, Jonathan Cape, London, 1961.

3 VICTOR DE LAPRADE, *Le sentiment de la nature avant le Christianisme*, p. 257 ff, Paris, 1866: "Dans l'Orient primitif, l'incommensurable, l'infini entourent de tous cotès L'ecrasent".

Bay of Bengal.[4] This inverted triangular territory with Cape Comorin as the apex would include as well present-day Kerala, and the outer fringes of Karnataka and Andhradesa. These districts were Tamil-speaking in ancient times, and Nature as obtained on the Western shore and Western Ghats, namely in the Ceera kingdom, came in for as much poetic interpretation as Nature in the Paaṇṭiya and Cooḷa kingdoms. With the inclusion of the Malabar coast the natural prospect that the Tamil poet had in view is seen in all its divergence and richness. In the last two thousand years, there has been change in the geographical configuration and climatic conditions of South India. Here and there the sea has gained upon the land, or the land has encroached upon the sea. Here and there a harbour has been silted up as in the historic places of Korkai and Arikameedu, a river has changed its course or been divided into anicuts, a hill has subsided. The main aspects of natural panorama remain unaltered. The whole region, however, was then more fertile and cooler; there were extensive acres of forests and jungles, and the hills were as yet not denuded to give room for acres of tea, coffee and rubber.[5] Even the plains contained large tracts of forest land.

There was abundant variety in the landscape offered to the Tamil poet for study and contemplation. From the sandy beaches of the Coromandel to the plains of the Cooḷa and Paaṇṭiya regions gradually changing into woodland, or progressively ascending to meet the ranges of the Western Ghats which shoot out the Nilgris, the Palani and Aanaimalai hills, there is the diversity which gave rise to the five-fold regional division fundamental to Tamil poetry. It is possible that the traveller today who uses the main trunk road or the railway from Madras to Tuticorin will probably have impressions of a general aridity and barrenness, especially if he has covered the Madras-Maturai section by night, but no impression of

[4] K. RAMAMURTHI, "Some aspects of the Regional Geography of Tamil Naad", *Indian Geographical Journal*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2 ff; K. M. PANIKKAR, *Geographical Factors in Indian History*, p. 24, Bombay, 1955.

[5] On extent of territory see evidence cited in M. S. PURNALINGAM PILLAI, *Tamil India*, o.c. pp. 1-20; G. S. DURAISAMY PILLAI, *Tamil Literature* (Tm) pp. 7-13, Calcutta, 1931.

Nature in South India may be said to be accurate or complete without a visit to the Western Ghats, the Nilgris, or Kodaikaanal, and to the long strip of luscious greenery and backwater between the frontier mountains of Travancore-Cochin and the Arabian Sea. Except for the absence of snow, South India is representative of a great range of climate and terrain.[6]

The diversified landscape of South India is in striking contrast with that of Northern India where the low river valleys form an unending monotonous feature. When one compares the Nature poetry of Kālidāsa with the Cankam poetry of the Tamils, one is in a position to understand how in India itself the different geographical features and climatic conditions obtaining in the North and the South, have been responsible for a difference of outlook regarding the concept and interpretation of Landscape.

The Language

The names of flowers and trees have been used to the utmost advantage by the Tamil poets to lend music to their verse which, like Greek and Latin, is based on quantity. They took full advantage of the names, and as in Vergil, there are entire lines which are but strings of names, resounding musical lines; "lines pulsing with the incomparable joy of the born poet in the joy of the singing, the sonorous word, a delight which is the first requisite of his work of art; lines that spring from this most sensuous, most indispensable, element to flower in the magic of 'names' which in their turn derive from the spiritual might of man from his faculty to give names to persons and to things".[7] Tamil has not the ceremonial pomp of Latin, but the names, contain such a wealth of vocalic sounds, that their concatenation in poetic lines has a most pleasing effect.

6 Complete accounts of the land and the flora and fauna of the various civil districts (e.g., Tinnevelly, Maturai, Nilgris) are to be found in the *Gazetteers* published by the Government. For Kerala, the *State Manual* provides similar information and exhaustive descriptions.

7 THEODOR HAECKER, *Vergil*, p. 43, London, 1934.

There are Vergil's lines, for example, in the second eclogue:

Huc ades o formonse puer; tibi lilia plenis,
Ecce, ferunt Nymphae calathis; tibi candida Nais,
Pallentes violas et summa papavera carpens,
Narcissum et florem iungit bene olentis anethi.

The entire passage in English runs:

"Come hither, O fair boy; for thee lo, the Nymphs bring baskets full of lilies; for thee the white Naiad plucks pale violets and poppy heads, and adds the narcissus and the fragrant anise-flower, and entwining them with casia and other sweet-scented herbs, spangles soft hyacinth posies with yellow marigold. Myself will gather quinces with delicate silvery bloom, and the chestnuts that my Amaryllis loved, and waxen plums withal, this fruit likewise shall have his honour, and you will I pluck, O laurels, and thee, bordering myrtle, since so set you mingle your fragrant sweets".

Compare the Latin lines with the music of the lines taken from a Tamil pastoral:

Mellinar konrayum menmalar kaayaavum
Pullilay vetciyum pitavum talavum
Kullayum kuruntum kootalum paankarum
Kallavum katatavum kamalkanni malaintanar.
(*Kali*; 103, 1-4)

Kapilar, who may be ranked as a great Nature poet, has in his poem *Kuriñcippaaṭṭu* woven into thirty-four lines the names of ninety-nine flowers.

Cankam Tamil has the characteristic of being extremely concise and curt and of delineating magnificent word-pictures with great economy of language. The names of trees and plants and flowers occur frequently in lyric poetry. Their descriptions are brief, often confined to one or two significant descriptive or restrictive qualifiers regarding the kind of leaves a tree bears, whether they are dented or soft or dense; or regarding the flowers, what colour they are, how clustered, whether they are soft and cool, dense-petaled or spare; or regarding the kind of stem a tree has, slender or thick, or black or red or mottled. The poets use the greatest economy

of words in the similes they employ to describe these objects of Nature. Their use of descriptive words function like the Homeric double adjectives, "many-fountained Ida", "leaf-quivering Abydos", "rosy-fingered dawn" and the "wine dark sea". Some of their laconic descriptive phrases may thus be translated: "thick-stalked *neytal*", "slender stemmed *unnam*", "red-trunked *veṭci*", "fire-resembling flower branch", "fragrant-flowered delicate cluster", "tiny-winged dragon-fly", "white-haired sea", "gem-like lofty mountain".[8]

Long and sustained Nature similes are comparatively few in Cankam poetry, because brevity was the soul of Cankam wit. Exceptions to this statement are to be found in poems where a Nature simile is combined with a historical allusion. Otherwise a Nature simile running into three or four lines does not occur too often in the anthologies. The following may be considered out of the ordinary in length:

> She is fragrant and refreshingly cool as the rich water-dripping buds of the *pittikam* (in the rainy season) which have been gathered together in a palmyra-leaf hamper and then scattered out on a rainy morn.
>
> (*Kur*; 168)

In spite of this economy, however, the names of trees, flowers and plants sound prominent and musical in the technique of the Tamil poets as in the following lines:

While the dense-leafed kaaya flowers forth eye-paint
And the leaf bunched konrai sheds her finest gold,
While the folded-bud koodal opens out her palms
And the thick-clustered toonri blooms forth blood.
While the water-front taalai flowers out her swans
And the new bloom cerunti deceives with her gold
While the prime flowering muntakam flaunts about her gems
And the slender-stemmed punnai hangs out her pearls.[9]

[8] *Kur*, 9; *Patir;* 40, 17; *Tirumur*; 20; *Akam;* 41, 3; *Kur;* 10; *Kur;* 239; *Puram*; 2, 10; *Kur*; 270.
[9] *Mullaipaattu*; 93-96; *Cirupaan*; 146-149.

Climate and Imagery

The language of Tamil poetry, its figures of speech and imagery, bear the stamp of the land and the climate in which they were coined. The South Indian climate (if you except the highest hills for a few months) never too cold to exclude the possibility of outdoor life and enjoyment, promoted an intimate life with Nature in the open. So did also the heat of the warmer months, when relief was to be found only under the shade of trees with the breeze freely blowing, or within the cool waters of a tank over-covered by the branches of *marutam* trees. The poems describing the regions of the Tamil country show the people as dancing under the bowers, as holding their village meetings and deliberations under umbrageous trees, as feasting in the open, as indulging in the pleasure that only those in warm climates know in bathing in tanks and rivers and the sea, as decorating themselves even in daily life with garlands and leaves, in short, living a close and intimate life with Nature. An unsophisticated spontaneity like that which Vergil attributes to his shepherds passing their days in endless song in the grasses of the Roman campagna, may be seen in the lives of the people of Tamil Naad as depicted sometimes by their poets.

It is again the climate which accounts for the prominence given in Tamil poetry to certain seasons of the year and certain periods of the day. Among the six seasons, both *kaar* (rainy season) and *mutu veenil* (late spring or summer) seem to have engaged more attention on the part of poets, for this reason that the former was eagerly awaited after the spell of warm weather and cultivation was so much dependent on rainfall, and the latter made itself felt by bringing with it extremely unpleasant weather. It is but natural that the noonday heat, as well as the restfulness of evening came in for comment by those interested in the weather, and hence the midday, the evening, and the sundown with its attendant gloaming, are conspicuously treated in Nature poetry. Besides, these periods of the day were reserved for certain emotional experiences for which the poets had a preference.

Extreme heat is deprecated in all literatures, but in European

and American literature "warmth" is a welcome word symbolic of love and piety, and in cold countries, a fire is the sign of comfort and friendliness. Notwithstanding the probable origin of Tamilian life on the hills where the fires were kindled to keep off the cold, warmth and heat in Tamil are invariably used of anger, cruelty, or anguish, as in the lines:

But for the roar of angry waters
There's no other heat in your broad uplands[10]

where the poet says that except for the roar of the river in spate, there is no "heat" in the king's domain. No enemy forces may reach his land, and the nearest approach to sounds of war are the roaring waters of the river. It is only in countries like India where the heat is remarkably scorching for a few months, the Summer sun would be looked upon as an unrighteous and cruel king who torments his subjects.[11] To one line of Vergil like,

medios cum sol accenderit aestus
cum sitiunt herbae et pecori iam gratior est umbra[12]
(When the sun has kindled the noonday heat, when the grass is athirst, and the shade now is welcome to the flock)

we shall find several in the composition of the Tamil poets expressive of the kindliness of the shade, for the sun is too much with us, while of the shade we can never have enough.

The shade of a tree as well as shade in general has come to be figurative of beneficent blessings. Where a Western mystic would have spoken of basking in the sunshine of God's love, a Tamil devotee would speak of reclining under the shadow of His feet.[13] The shade of the tree that offers hospitality to the shepherd and the wayfarer is the symbol of protection, and even of pleasure and solace and comfort:

Those who live under your shade know no other heat, than the heat of the kitchen-fire and the heat of the sun.

(*Puram;* 20, 8-9)

[10] *Patir;* 28, 13-14.
[11] *Kali;* 1-4; Introductory lines.
[12] *Georgics,* IV. 400-401; *Eclogue,* 11, 16.
[13] *Pari;* 5, 77; 13, 47.

It is not unlikely that the form of the tree originally suggested the shape of the open umbrella, which is symbolic of sovereignty. In the panegyric poems, subjects are spoken of as being happy under the protection of the king's umbrella. Consequently, the shade of the umbrella as much as that of the tree means benignity, kindness, favour, and grace.[14]

There is one poem which deserves notice because of the manner in which it proves to be a happy exception to the foregoing statements, and combines feeling for both warmth and coolness with a picturesque observation regarding rays of warm sunshine stored within the corolla of a lotus. The poet imagines a lover as speaking of his beloved.[15]

> *In the warm season she has the coolness of the sandal-wood of the mystic and inaccessible god-dwelling ranges of the Potiyil hills; in the season of dew she has the mild warmth of the deep recess of the lotus that folds itself at sunset having gathered within its bosom the tender shimmering sunshine.*
>
> (*Kur*; 376)

The language of Tamil poetry is very sensitive to the physical sensation of pleasure caused by shady trees, and copses and groves. Tamil poets have consequently analysed the different kinds of shade which their landscape provided at different times of the year or at different times of the day.

There is the thick umbrageous shade as thick as dense darkness itself; there is the "spotted shade" of the tree that lets sun-flecks in; there is the fine delicate tracery of the leafless tree of the desert which looks as if a net has been cast upon the tree itself. Then there is "the welcome shade", the "tender shade", the "thick shade", the "inadequate shade", the "cooling shade".[16] In the hilly region, the dense vegetation and large trees cause such cooling shade that entering a forest grove one feels as if entering the cooling waters of a pool.

The *mullai* bowers of the pasture lands and the pergola in front of the houses of the *marutam* regions and the groves ad-

[14] *Patir;* 37, 10; *Pari;* 3, 74, 75; *Porun;* 148; *Maduraik;* 168; *Nar;* 146.

[15] *Kur;* 376.

[16] *Kur*; 123; *Akam*; 379; *Porun*; 50; *Cirupaan*; 12; *Kur*; 232; *Kur*; 338; *Malaipatu*; 46, 259 ff, 271.

joining the sea-shore, are frequently mentioned by the poets as the meeting places of lovers or of social festivities. Epithets expressive of refreshing shade and coolness occur wherever possible and with a frequency that denotes how welcome the shade was to people in the torrid zone. Even eyes of women are invariably compared to flowers or petals, especially of aquatic plants:

> Her eyes as cooling as flowers of the aambal—*Kur*; 84, 5.
> Her cooling eyes—*Passim*.
> Her eyes as cooling as flowers that bloom in clear waters—*Kur*; 329.

What is to be noted regarding the use of this epithet (taṇ) signifying coolness is that it is not only prefixed to everything pleasant and welcome as in the expression "the cloud of refreshing sound," but has been transferred even to what is dear and what claims loyalty such as language and country, as in the expression *taṇṭamil*.[17]

If drops of gentle rain that beat on the face are said to be one of the finest sensations of pleasure from Nature that one derives anywhere in the world, the sensation is certainly greater in the tropics. It is to this sensation which climate accentuates that one would like to attribute the many delicate references which Cankam poetry has to drizzling rain, to gentle raindrops, to the welcome patter of the rain on the roofs, to the spray from raindrops and even to the pearl-like drops of water resulting from the spray of the waves that break upon the shore.[18]

It is again only in a climate such as that of India that the cloud would assume an importance and a significance that Shelley never contemplated, and rain would be the harbinger of new life. The sound of thunder before rain, the sight of rainclouds, the water-spout, the gentle drizzle as well as the torrential showers, are mentioned or described with the enthusiasm and pleasure that is understandable in people almost entirely dependent on the rain for prosperity. Not without justification did the Tamils name the raincloud *eḻili*, the beauti-

[17] *Patir;* 63, 9.
[18] *Kur;* 5.

ful one *par excellence.* Describing the sudden change in a girl hitherto forlorn but now happy after her tryst with her lover, the poet says:[19]

> *Parched was she like waterless waste; 'tis morning*
> *And behold her picturesque like land after rain.*
> (*Kali;* 38, 11-12)

And another compares a chieftain's liberality to an unexpected shower of rain that bestows new life to cultivation on the mountains.

The cloud is the symbol of beneficence. It gathers the waters of the ocean and sheds them on the land, as kings confer on their subjects the treasures gathered by the strength of their armies. The cloud gives its waters in abundance without reserving anything for itself and without any discrimination regarding the kind of land over which it rains. Likewise do kings and chiefs like *Paari* and *Peekan* who imitate its bounty[20] Says a poet addressing a king:[21]

> *With a cloud's liberality you rained precious gifts thus extinguishing my summer heat.*

Another poet in an apostrophe to a dancing maid says:

> *Tender maid, thy ear hath heard of greatness.*
> *Thy eye, however, hath seen it not.*
> *Shouldst thou yearn to see it, set forth*
> *So that the mountain breezes play through*
> *Your scented flowing tresses. Thus walk*
> *With dainty, plumed-peacock gait to see Aay*
> *The chieftain, liberal as the cloud.*
> (*Puram;* 133)

Because water in itself is so precious for life and gives itself to everyone without distinction, liberality came to be signified by water as in the lines:

[19] See also *Nar;* 22, 9-11.
[20] *Puram;* 107; 142; 159; 15-20; 174; 24-28; *Cirupaan;* 124; *Kali* 57, 12.
[21] *Puram;* 397, 16-18.

Paari, of nature, sweeter than (river) water

(*Puram;* 105, 7)

Of sweeter and cooler nature than water of the Vaani river that brings sandalwood

(*Patir;* 86, 13)

Your mother like summer waters

(*Kali;* 42, 84)

Water tastes peculiarly sweet after one has been eating the gooseberry and this too is pointed out in the poems:

Her words as sweet as the taste of those that drink water after having eaten of the nelli's green fruit

(*Akam;* 54, 15, 16)

A tender heart in Tamil is spoken of as a "moist" heart. Moisture signifies kindness and tenderness as in the line:

Regarding moisture, like water art thou.

(*Patir;* 90, 14)

The fecundity of the earth and its maternal kindness to man made all the ancients speak of the earth as a woman and mother. But Tamil poetry like Sanskrit poetry carried the comparison even further and spoke of the mountains as the breasts of Mother Earth, the bamboos as her slim shoulders, the rivers as her necklaces and her garlands, the ocean as her foam-bordered garment.[22] Of these Nature's landmarks Tamil poetry paid most attention to the rivers since these were the source of fertility for the Tamil land, a source that failed not even when the rains failed.

It should be noted in concluding a chapter on the background of Nature poetry, that there are other countries which have been better endowed by Nature. But the poetic resource of this age found beauty even in the most ordinary and uninteresting regions. The fact that these poets have been able to find good poetry even in a desert landscape, as we shall see later, speaks very highly for their poetic resource and imaginative skill.

[22] *Cirupaan;* 1-2.

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE AND NATURE

Earlier Contact with Nature

Nature and the poetic interpretation of Nature are terms which are better known than defined. However, Nature has been defined as the outer world of sense perception which is not man nor the immediate work of man. The word "Nature" has been used in preference to "landscape" in contexts like the present, because landscape is far too concerned with contours, colour and grouping to take into account the relation of the natural world to the poet and to his interpretations.[1]

The poet's interest in the natural world is not the same as the interest of the agriculturist or the scientist. A farmer's interest in Nature, as Ruskin and others have observed, is very pronounced in the *Odyssey,* and may be traced in the very early literature of every people including that of the Tamils.[2] Such an interest is centred rather around the utility than the sublimity and beauty of the universe, and this kind of interest continues even in the poetry of later eras. As a characteristic example of this interest among the Greeks, their emphasis on the useful, may be taken the words of Pallas to Ulysses:

> This Ithaca of ours is indeed a rough country enough, and not good for driving in; but, still things might be worse; it has plenty of corn, and good wine, and always rain, and soft nourishing dew, and it has good feeding for goats and oxen, and all manner of wood, and springs fit to drink at all the year round.[3]

Nor is the examination of cause and effect the purpose of

1 FREDERIC W. MOORMAN, *The Interpretation of Nature in English poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare,* p. 2 f, Strassburg, 1905.

2 JOHN RUSKIN, *Modern Painters,* Vol. III, Ch. XIII, "Of Classical Landscape."

3 *Odyssey,* XIII, p. 236 ff.

the poet, though he may make full use of the discoveries of science. His is the study of the beauty of the universe. But of this beauty he studies not merely the bare appearances, the contours of the hills, the colours of the sunset and the rainbow; he does not merely express the sensuously beautiful in rhythmic language. He enters deeper into the secrets of Nature and examines Nature's relationship with man. His poetic outlook is different also from the outlook of the philosopher, for while the latter's attention is focussed on truth, the former concentrates his vision on beauty. Though ancient Tamil poetry includes lines of a deeply philosophic nature, and though Tamil poets off and on revel in details more natural to scientific treatises on botany or biology, Tamil poetry is never without a close association with beauty as related to man and human action, in short, without clothing nature in the hues of human passion.[4]

Stages have been marked out in the progressive appreciation of Nature by man. The earliest stage is that of the mere organic feeling of pleasure at the manifestations of Nature that please as sunshine and gentle showers of rain, and pain at those that hurt as chilling wind and driving snow. In Shairp's words it is "that simple, spontaneous, unreflecting pleasure which all unsophisticated beings feel in free open-air life", such fresh child-like delight in Nature as is found in Chaucer and Spenser. Next to this comes the appreciation of the physically beneficent forces in Nature, and those recognized as conducive to utility. Still higher in the scale occurs the point where the sympathetic interpretation of Nature

[4] J. C. Shairp, *On the Poetic Interpretation of Nature,* p. 15, New York, 1877:

> What is that aspect of Nature, that truth of the External World, with which poetry has more immediately to do. To put it in the simplest way: it is Beauty, that strange and wonderful entity with which all creation is clothed as with a garment, or rather I should say pervaded and penetrated as by a subtle essence, inwrought into its inmost fibre. The Poet is the man to whom is given the eye that sees this more instinctively, the heart that feels it more intensely, than other men do; and who has the power to express it and bring it home to his fellow-men.

comes into view and where Nature is brought into relationship with man.

Apart from the historical examination of the evolution of man's appreciation of Nature, we may analyse the different ways in which poets may deal with Nature. Though in some respects this coincides with the matter of the previous paragraph, yet the examination shows that poets of the same epoch may see Nature from different aspects. There is the simple interpretation which is just child-like joy in the presence of Nature without any intellectual or moral elements entering into the treatment. Superficially akin to this enjoyment but essentially quite different from it, is the "sensuous" enjoyment of Nature, when the poet is engrossed in the material beauty of the universe as mere material beauty. Keats is often presented as such a poet. He differed from Wordsworth and Shelley in his treatment of Nature, and no English poet of his time described pure "sensuous" beauty as he did.[5] Nature may be used also as a mere source of imagery and illustration, as a rich store-house of objects to supply similes and metaphors. Or it may be made to supply its greatest interest when associated with human events, or when viewed as the background or setting to human emotion and human action.[6]

Since the earliest Tamil poetry that has come down to us is generally the product of a civilized period and of a well-established culture, it is not surprising that its interpretation of Nature does not contain the simple or the utilitarian appreciation as the prominent characteristic. When the Cankam classics came into being, Tamil poetry had already for many years reached the last and final stage of its evolution in the poetic appreciation of Nature. Lines do occur which express simple joy at the coolness of water, the pleasures of shade and bower, child-like joy at the sight or the use of flowers;

[5] See Vietch, *The Feeling for Nature in Scottish Poetry* summarized in Frederic W. Moorman, o.c. p. 5; W. H. Hudson, *An Introduction to the Study of Literature*. Appendix II, *On the Treatment of Nature in Poetry*, pp. 319-331, London, 1945.

[6] See Shairp's views in *The Poetic Interpretation of Nature* improved on by Hudson, o.c. ibid.

lines do occur when the material beauty of the universe is expressed with the freshness of Keats and the keen observation of a Vergil or Tennyson, but these lines are never without relation to man. However, in Tamil poetry occur certain conventions which are the remains and echoes of a very primitive and distant age when there was less faith in the interaction of Nature and humanity, though there was more of immediate contact with Nature. What was actually a mode of life later became a custom, and finally crystallized into a hallowed poetic convention which was followed in poetry even when the custom became obsolete.

A lover is depicted, for instance, in ancient poetry as presenting his beloved with garments of leaves, or of garments interwoven with leaves and flowers, to be worn round about the waist over whatever clothes she may wear. Such leafy garments were also given as gifts on ceremonial occasions or as symbols of friendship and hospitality and worn on days of social rejoicing.[7] It is likely that this custom was but the relic of a time centuries earlier, when cotton fabrics were unknown and the primitive folk covered themselves only with leaves. There are also references to the ritual of marriage taking place under the spreading shade of a *veenkai* tree in full bloom.[8] There are, on the other hand, indications that the wedding ritual at this time was performed under a temporary hall erected in front of the house.[9] This mode of marriage under a flowering *veenkai* is just a poetic convention, but a convention that points out to an earlier period when life was more primitive, and trees were the actual temples and halls of the population, and when marriages did actually take place under arboreal shades. Husking paddy and other cereals are said to be done in the open with the cavities which Nature has made in rocks as mortars, and the tusks of elephants or sandalwood branches as pestles.[10] At the time of the composition of the poem the Tamils had mortars and pestles in their homes, but

[7] *Kur;* 125, 214, 295; *Puram;* 248; *Nar;* 170, 320; *Aink;* 72, 73; *Kurinci* 103.

[8] *Kali;* 39, 33 ff. *Veenkai* is the Indian Kino.

[9] *Akam;* 86, 3; cf. *Akam;* 156.

[10] *Kali;* 41, 1-4; cfr. *Kali;* 40, 1-4.

in depicting Nature's mortars and costly pestles, the poet seeks to embellish a common scene by presenting a closer touch with Nature and with primitive life.

From *Puram* poetry too a similar illustration may be given. According to the literary conventions of *Tolkaappiyam*, the first stage of war is cattle-lifting. This again is a reminiscence of earlier society when cattle was the chief wealth of Tamil chiefs and when cattle-lifting was the predominant cause of warfare between clans and settlements. But later poetry treated of cattle-lifting as a preamble to war even when no cattle-lifting preceded war.[11] Similarly, tree-worship, primitive dances and ritual as portrayed in Cankam literature, all refer to a time when life was physically more intimate with Nature.

A surprising evidence for the earlier contact with Nature, is not merely the use of leaf-garments, but also the names of the ornaments of Tamil women, which recall the time when rolls of strips of the palmyrah leaf were used for the perforations in the ear, and branches of creepers were entwined about the arms and legs and neck.[12] The names of the ornaments are the names of leaves, or creepers or flowers, as for example:

tootu, arasilai, kulai, poomkulai oolai, kontilavoolai, talikkoti.[13]

Intimate Life with Nature

A love of Nature cannot but be engendered in a people that come often in touch with Nature. The influence in fostering an appreciation and love of Nature is mutual between poets and people. The Tamil poets came from the people who as a nation were intimate with Nature, and the people were encouraged in their enthusiasm for Nature by what the poets wrote.

The Tamil learnt to love flowers and plants even from his very childhood. The eldest sons of warriors when they set

[11] H.T. pp. 63-71, where the author is brilliantly original in his suggestions.

[12] *Puram;* 63, 12; 352, 5.

[13] Cfr: *Sentamil.* Vol. VI, Parts 7 and 8; S. GNANAPRAKASAR, *The Tamils, their Early History and Religion* (Tm), p. 38 Jaffna, 1932.

their eyes on their fathers for the first time, saw them in the panoply of war adorned with the garlands of warfare. It was the custom then that a few days after the birth of the heir, the king, dressed in battle-array which included also garlands of flowers, should show himself to his son, so that the child's first sight of his father might be that of his father as warrior.[14]

Infants had a few flowers tied to their fore-locks which were brushed back to a side above the forehead. The fifth poem in the *Akam* collection speaks of a heroine who went up to her husband about to depart for another country. She was silent; a forced smile broke the pressure of her lips; tears welled up in her eyes. Her entire countenance bespoke a pleading that ne should desist from parting. She pressed her child to her bosom and smelt daintily the fragrant flowers adorning the boy's hair. She breathed a sigh and the flowers faded—so warm was her breath of anguish.[15]

The younger children, counted among their toys, little dolls, made out of the petals or pollen-bed of flowers. Children young and old, played games under the shades of trees, games in which the seeds of fruits or dried fruits themselves formed the indispensable materials of the games.[16] Their leisure was spent in the gardens and groves gathering flowers and leaves of the region, weaving garlands out of them, or preparing the leafy dresses with which they adorned themselves. The garlands were either of one kind of flowers or of diverse flowers or of flowers interspersed with leaves.[17] Bathing in the sea, the river, the lake and tanks, was one of the most pleasurable pastimes of outdoor life seen in Cankam literature. Young and old of both sexes dived and swam and played merrily with the surf or with the waves and eddies in rivers and tanks. Even in places of religious pilgrimage, there were large tanks where bathing for sport and pleasure was common.[18] The *Kuriñcippaaṭṭu* of Kapilar mentions the many ways in which girls delight themselves on the hills, their sitting on an eminence prepared as

[14] *Puram;* 100.
[15] *Akam;* 5.
[16] *Kur;* 48; *Nar;* 3, 2-4; 79, 2-3; cfr. *Nar;* 68, 155; *Puram;* 176.
[17] The leafy-dress also had flowers interwoven with leaves.
[18] *Paripaaṭal;* 9, 61.

an ambush to drive away the parrots, their raising such cries as frighten the birds in their nests, their sporting in the river whose waters flow from the mountain heights "like white linen", and their having dried themselves and their hair, gathering flowers on the hillsides. Such pleasurable distractions, sometimes in the company of the hero, were not confined to the hillsides.[19] In the other regions, except obviously in the *paalai,* the young enjoyed themselves in like manner. The *Paṭṭinappaalai* gives an account of the *neytal* regions, how the fisher-folk on full moon days, adorned themselves with the flowers of their own region, played on the beach with crabs and the waves, built castles on the sand, and thus passed the live-long day.[20] The *Kali* odes give many an indication of the festive dance under *mullai* bowers and the arcadic life of the shepherds in the open air.[21] *Marutam* was known for its aquatic sports. Not only the long descriptions in *Paripaaṭal,* but also other verses reveal a keen appreciation of water sports.[22] The *Paṭṭinappaalai* says that the ritual bathing in the tanks of Pukaar were productive of happiness in both worlds.[23]

The people in the poems had their houses built in beautiful surroundings, in the centre of a garden. Pergolated paths led to the central entrance. It is under these bowers that the young heroine is often pictured as engaged in play. Here too the heroine plants a creeper or plant and waters it daily with her own hands.[24] Sometimes, it is a plant that is grown in an earthen jar or flower pot.[25] When the heroine has left home with her lover, these plants that she has nurtured are among the constant reminders to the nurse of the child now lost to her.[26]

A *Naṟṟiṇai* poem (172) speaks of a *punnai* plant watered by the heroine as having been considered to be her younger sister.

Natural beauty and flowers entered on a preponderant

[19] *Kurincippaattu, Passim;* 259. [20] *Pattinappaalai,* 11; 85; 105.
[21] *Kali;* 1; 49; 3; 75; 6; 47.
[22] *Aink;* 71-80; *Paripaatal* poems on Vaiai.
[23] *Pattinappaalai,* 1; 39. [24] *Nar;* 179, 1: "305,1". *Akam;* 89, 21.
[25] *Akam;* 165, 11. [26] *Nar;* 110; 305.

scale in the story of Tamil love. The poets idealize the spots on which lovers meet. The first meeting as developed in *Iraiyanaar Akapporuḷ* where Nature's setting is most picturesque for the drama of love, is but a development of or a composition of several such scenes in Cankam literature. One of the conventional situations in which lovers meet is when the heroine is out in the open gathering *veenkai* flowers together with her young companions. It was the custom among children to shout out "Tiger, Tiger" in the childish belief that the *veenkai* would lower its branches within reach for them to pluck its flowers. The colour of the *veenkai* flower which resembles that of the tiger was the cause of the origin of this cry. A heroine, with her companions, plays about the *veenkai* with shouts of "Tiger, Tiger". A young chief who is out hunting hears the cry and hastens to the place of the alarm. "Where has fled the tiger"? he queries in anxiety. The girls hide one behind the other in shyness. "Is it possible that falsehood emanates even from lips such as yours"? he pointedly remarks and hastens away, but not before his eyes have met the eyes of the heroine and spoken with her in the language of the eyes.[27]

The *veenkai* tree is closely associated in poetry with love in the mountain region. It presents a very pleasing sight when in bloom with its golden bunches of blossoms "as finely wrought as the workmanship of the cleverest jeweller." Often its flowers are compared to flames of fire. Its petals strewn on a rock below the tree remind the poet, because of their colour, of a tiger asleep.[28] Its flowering season was considered to be auspicious and was set apart for the public celebration of weddings, and betrothed couples awaited eagerly for it to burst into flower.[29] There is room to believe that at first, marriages were celebrated under the flowering *veenkai*, because it was the shadiest and loveliest tree of the region. Hence its flowering was understood to introduce auspicious days for lovers.

In many a poem the maid urges the hero to celebrate the public wedding now that the *veenkai* has bloomed, or she consoles her mistress saying now that the *veenkai* has flowered,

[27] *Akam;* 48, 52. [28] *Puram;* 202, 18-21. Cfr: *Kur;* 47.
[29] *Pari;* 14, 11-12; *Akam;* 12.

her lover will soon return and they will be united forever after ceremonial wed-lock.[30] This association of the *veenkai* with weddings led to the custom of new brides adorning their hair with these golden flowers, and of parents carrying out deliberations regarding their children's espousals, and of the festive dances taking place on the marriage day, under a flowering *veenkai*.[31] A touching poem in the *Naṟṟiṇai* collection speaks of a heroine weeping almost unconsciously as soon as she adverted the *veenkai* had flowered, for she realized that of her lover's return there was as yet no sign.[32]

Veenkai flowers were among those whose lovers preferred to give their beloveds, especially during the period of courtship. Lovers exchanged garlands among themselves.[33] The hero himself adorns the heroine's tresses with the flowers he has brought for her.[34] He makes presents of bouquets of flowers and leafy-dresses or leafy-girdles to be worn as ornaments around the waist.[35] Another flower commonly presented by lovers of the hills was the *gloriosa superba*. In the first poem of *Kuṟuntokai*, the maid companion rebukes a chief mildly when he hands bunches of *gloriosa superba* that he has brought from his own hills to be presented to the heroine. She implies by the rebuke that the chief ought to marry the heroine, and thus end the courtship which has been the occasion for gossip in the vicinity. Her laconic statement is, "On our own hill sacred to Murukan, flowers also this clustered blood-red flower", meaning that she rejects his offer of flowers to her lady.[36]

The heroine on the other hand, once in love is desperately in love with all the natural objects connected with her lover, with the hills which are his possession, with the clouds that sail over them, with river or stream that brings waters of the hills, with the plants and flowers which these waters wash down from the chief's mountainous abode. To a maid sorrowful because of her mistress languishing for her lover, the mistress says:

[30] *Akam;* 2; *Kali;* 38, *Nar;* 206. Cfr: *Akam;* 378.
[31] *Nar;* 313; *Kali;* 42; Cfr; *Kur;* 241.
[32] *Nar;* 241. [33] *Nar;* 313. [34] *Kur;* 312, 5.
[35] *Kur;* 214, Cfr; *Kur;* 333, 342; *Pari;* 6, 66. [36] *Kur;* 1.

Hitherto I consoled myself by gazing at his hill. But now that it is evening, his hill seems to disappear gradually like a ship that sinks at sea. Hence I am inconsolable.[37]

Again to a maid who wonders if her mistress would be able to support the grief of separation, the mistress says:

Look at my forehead. The effect of sorrow is no more there. The reason is that I have beheld his hill washed by heavy rain, where groups of peacocks cry in the thick groves, and where the pale-monkeys and their little ones shiver with cold.[38]

Nature has the objects with which the heroine consoles herself during the absence of her lover.

There is a little stanza of Avvai, which is significant in its suggestion regarding the love a heroine has for the hill associated with her lover. The heroine is found to be of poor health by her parents. The mother seeks a woman-diviner to find out the cause. The diviner divines with grains of paddy, and with the help of prayer to the gods announces the cause of her illness, namely, that it comes from Murukan, the god of the hills, and that he must be appeased with the dance sacred to him. To such a diviner occupied in her divination with the grains of paddy, the maid says, "sing not of the gods, but sing the song of his hill that you have been singing", so that the parents might understand that she is love-sick.

Maid of the long call, maid of the sacred call,
Maid with beauteous hair, white like stringed shells,
Sing that song—do sing that song again,
The song that sings of his grand and lofty hill.[39]

While arrangements are being made for the heroine's wedding, the maid observes to the heroine that she has bravely borne the pangs of separation. To her the heroine replies that she was able to do so because of the comfort she has derived from a *gloriosa superba* plant washed down stream from the hill of her lover by the night's rain. She took it in her hands, fondly kissed it many times because it came from her lover's hill, and planted it in her own garden. The sight of that plant

[37] *Kur;* 240. [38] *Kur;* 249. [39] *Kur;* 23.

gave her joy enough to await with resignation such time as would bring the nuptial day. The mother saw her fetching the plant from the stream and planting it, but said nothing. Even the highest heaven would not be adequate reward for her goodness, was the opinion of the heroine.

Listen, maid dear. The highest heaven would be small reward for mother. I fetched the kaantal tuber that arrived one morning brought by the fragrant stream fed by the evening rain on his hill. I kissed the tender leaves so repeatedly that they withered; and I planted it at home. Mother watched me but breathed not a word.

(*Kur;* 361)

The wedding ritual itself included the use of petals of flowers and paddy grains. Before the bride was taken to her chamber, four ladies who already had given birth to children, were appointed to strew flowers and paddy grains on the bride and pronounce this greeting:

May you never swerve from chastity and thus do good, and may you be a partner in life that loves her husband.[40]

Disappointed lovers too said their disappointment with flowers in the later developments of love poetry. They wore garlands of the most uncared for flowers (e.g. *erukkalai*) and mounting palmyrah stalks made after the fashion of a horse, they went about proclaiming their grief.[41]

In daily life too garlands were profusely used, especially when men and women went on their social visits or on religious pilgrimage. In the *Paripaaṭal* occurs a statement that the entire road from Maturai to Tirupparankunṛam, a distance of about four miles, seemed to be one long garland to an onlooker from the hill, so many were the pilgrims and so profusely had they decorated themselves with garlands.[42]

The people said it with flowers not only in love but also in friendship, in hospitality and even in relief of poverty and

[40] *Akam;* 86. Even the image of the god which was used for the marriage ceremony was made of petals of flowers, and laid on the tender Vaakai-flowers and grass. See *Akam,* 136.

[41] *Kur;* 17; 182; *Nar;* 220; H.T. pp. 170, 171.

[42] *Pari;* 19, 15-18.

want. When strangers passed through a village they were offered flowers as a sign of friendliness.[43] When poets and minstrels went to kings and chiefs to sing their praises and obtain relief in want, they were not only given elephants and lands and silks, but lotuses made of gold. It was the custom for the patron to present the head of the band of minstrels or dancers with lotuses of gold. Sometimes the gift consisted of flowers made of gold fastened together by bands of silver.[44] These musicians adorned even their musical instruments with garlands of flowers.[45]

During periods of mourning, flowers and garlands were not used as personal ornament or to adorn the other objects which they were wont to decorate with flowers. Poverty and suffering too were causes for abstaining from the use of flowers.[46] Among the many poems rich in pathos is an elegy on the death of a chief, in which the poet addresses the jasmine, "Wherefore bloomest thou when none will wear thee"? The poem mentions the many occasions on which flowers were worn:

> *The youths will have thee not. The bangled-damsels will gather thee not. The bard, to adorn his lyre's handle will receive thee not. The songstress will wear thee not. After Saattan of the strong bow who killed many a foe and showed his prowess, is no more—o mullai, dost thou bloom yet in Olliyuur's land?*
>
> (*Puram;* 242)

Upper class society, at the time of the composition of these poems, was hard on widows. They had to sleep on a bed of stones, and eat the rice of the white water-lily and fast and mourn their lot, or burn themselves on the funeral pyres of their husbands. A royal poetess says that it were better to die on the same pyre as her lord than live to lead a life so different from the one she led with her lord. To her, she says, after her lord's death, the cool waters of the lake where lotuses bloom and the raging fires of the pyre are the same. She

43 *Malaipatu;* 429 ff.

44 *Porun;* 159-160; *Perumpaan;* 481-482; *Malaipatu;* 568-569; *Puram;* 12. 1; 29; 1; 69; 4-21; 126, 1-3; *Kali;* 55, 2; 85, 2; *Puram;* 11, 18, 153, 7-8.

45 *Puram;* 242, 2-3. 46 *Kur;* 19.

would throw herself into the fire with as little concern as he would into a bathing pool.[47] Another widow, a poetess herself, who leads this penitential life prescribed by social convention, has a quatrain of simple beauty in which she addresses the water-lily. The poem is so fragile in its tender suggestiveness that one dare not risk a translation. It means, however, that it is sad indeed that the same water-lily which in the courtship days of the poetess served for her ceremonial dress of leaves, now that her husband is no more, should offer the grain which recalls to her a life of abnegation and loneliness.[48]

Nature and Folklore

We have seen the use made of garlands and flowers in warfare, and the different flowers which signified different strategic movements. It remains to sum up briefly those customs connected with Nature which have not been mentioned so far.

Each king and each chief had a tree which symbolized him and was called the tree which he guarded. He seems to have planted his outer defences with many trees of that species, and any king waging war against another was supposed to score a great victory over his enemy and disgrace him if he could penetrate into the forest defences of his enemy, and cut down his symbolic tree. Thus the margosa tree was the "guarded tree" of Paḷayan and the *punnai* of Tittan. It was also counted an act of defiance and bravery, if a king tied one of his elephants to the "guarded tree" in the forest defences of his enemy.[49] The story is narrated of the poet Saatanaar who went to receive a poet's gifts by singing the praises of a chief, Veḷimaan, by name. Since Veḷimaan was resting he refused to see the poet but ordered his younger brother to give a few gifts to the poet. The latter was niggardly in his giving. The poet refused his gifts, went to the chief Kumaṅan and having received ample presents which included one or more elephants, he brought one of them, and tied it to the "guarded tree" of Veḷimaan, and harangued him thus in his presence:

[47] *Puram;* 246. [48] *Puram;* 248

[49] *Patir;* 33, 3; *Puram;* 57, 10-11; 162, 5-6; 336, 4.

You are not one that gives or protects those who seek help; but neither are patrons wanting to those in need of succour. Learn then that there are those in want, and that there are those who meet their wants. The mighty elephant that I have tied to your "guarded tree" in the defence outside your castle, is a gift. O chief of the swift horse thus do I return.[50]

To spite an enemy king, there was also the custom among victors of making use of the timber of the "guarded trees" of vanquished chiefs or kings, for the wooden part of the drums that were used by their armies in proclaiming their victories.[51]

Besides these "guarded trees", the three kings of Tamil Naad, the Ceera, the Cooḷa, the the Paaṇṭiya had a flower each as his own emblem, just as the lily, the rose, and other flowers have been taken as emblems of royal houses in the West. The *aatti* flower was the emblem of the Cooḷas, the *Palmyrah* flower of the Ceeras, and the *margosa* flower of the *Paaṇṭiyaas*. A poet in addressing two of the Cooḷa family who were fighting among themselves for the Cooḷa throne, appeals to them thus with the hope of effecting a reconciliation:

You are not one who wears the white garland of the lofty palmyrah's flowers (Ceera), nor wear you the dark-branched margosa's garland (Paantiya). You wear the aatti's garland; so does he who faces you in battle. If one of you is defeated, it is the House of Coola that is defeated.[52]

When a king went to war, he wore garlands made of his royal flowers, as well as of flowers which signified the particular kind of warfare in which his troops and he were engaged.

Garlands of the flowers emblematic of the royal houses were used also to decorate the royal standards. In the graphic account of Paaṇṭiyan Neṭuñceḻian visiting the wounded at midnight, it is said that the general who preceded him pointing out the wounded soldiers one by one, carried a halberd around which was wound a garland of margosa flowers.[53]

Certain episodes which gradually formed part of the folk-

[50] *Puram;* 162. [51] *Patir;* 11, 12-14; 17, 5; *Akam;* 347, 4-5.
[52] *Puram;* 45, 1-5. [53] *Netunalvaatai;* 176 f.

lore of the Tamil people were such as to fire the imagination of poets and people in favour of a love of Nature and animals and birds.[54] There is the story of Paari, one of the seven chieftains renowned in Tamil literature for his liberality. He found one day a jasmine creeper lying across his chariot path. He would not ride his chariot over it, nor would he permit it to grow at random unsupported across the path. He abandoned his chariot on the spot so that the plant might creep on it for support. This unusual munificence towards a plant was the subject of poetic praise as the most characteristic act of his life.[55] There was Peekan who came in for equal praise because he found a peacock shivering with cold, and with gesture more gracious than that of Sir Walter Raleigh, covered the peacock with the silk mantle with which he was himself covered.[56] A story is recounted of birds in the person of *Aay Eyinan*. He was so much a lover of birds and their protector that when he fell in the field of battle, all the birds formed a canopy with their outstretched wings to protect him from the rays of the sun. And, it is added in the poems, that the owl was struck with grief at its own want of vision during the day for it could neither see Aay and his wounds, nor join the other birds in providing shelter.[57]

There is an anecdote concerning Kapilar, a poet who has written many a beautiful line of montane poetry. His great patron and friend was Paari, the chieftain who lent his chariot to a jasmine creeper. Paari's liberality was such that he gave away the revenue and ownership of the three hundred villages of his chieftaincy to poets and minstrels who had gone to him for help. The Parambu hill region alone remained for his own income. Such was the fame and prowess of Paari that it excited the rivalry of the three kings of Tamil Naad who besieged his rock fortress. Kapilar was with Paari within the fortifications when the siege took place. The poets narrate how Kapilar trained birds to go out of the fortifications and harvest the paddy in the fields. They brought the sheaves in

[54] See introductions to texts.
[55] *Puram*; 200, 9-11, 201, 2-3; *Cirupaan*; 87-91.
[56] *Puram*; 141; 10-12; 145, 1-3; *Cirupaan*; 85-87.
[57] *Akam*; 142, 181, 208.

their beaks, and thus helped those who were besieged to tide over the scarcity of food that the siege had caused.[58]

A love for the ideal in Nature was fostered by art and handicraft. Oori's hill, Kollimalai had on its western slope the sculpture of a goddess which was so lovely to behold that persons who viewed it were entranced by its beauty. The beauty of a heroine was compared by poets to the beauty of the statue on Oori's hill.[59]

There are many indications in Cankam literature of the developed state of the Fine Arts among the ancient Tamils, and these include several references to the influence which a love of Nature exerted on architecture, painting and music. It is on these references that P. T. Srinivas Iyengar based his conclusion: "This same love of Nature was the cause why they beautified their tools, their houses, their furniture, and their vessels with carvings imitative of creepers, leaves, flowers and animals".[60]

[58] *Akam;* 78, 303.
[59] *Kur;* 89, 100; *Akam;* 62, 13-16, 209, 15-17; *Nat;* 185, 6-11.
[60] H.T. p. 69.

POETIC CONVENTIONS

Concept of Nature

The physiographical lay-out of Tamil Naad, its flora and fauna, its hills and valleys, rivers and lakes, its deserts and sandy beaches, formed the basis for a considerable portion of Tamil poetic convention. The influence of Nature as obtained in the Tamil land on poetry was final and far-reaching and very decisive. Tamil poetry bears in nearly every page the imprint of the land and the landscape in which it has been created. Convention, evolved much earlier than the epoch which produced the literature we are examining, had divided the Tamil land into five regions, or rather convention had noted that the Tamil land contained five different kinds of natural landscape. It happens that the entire earth may be divided into these five regions, and it was the fortune of the Tamil to find diverse physiographical and climatic characteristics of the earth on a miniature scale within the boundaries of his native-land. He observed that the mountain region, the pasture-lands, the maritime tracts, the agricultural region, and the temporary dry, waterless arid patches, differed considerably from one another in their contours, in their vegetation, and in the manner of life that man had to evolve in each region. He named each region after its most characteristic flower, and also stated the psychological and emotional patterns of behaviour that would be appropriate to each region. He, therefore, made poetry, both *akam* and *puram,* love poetry and non-love poetry, subordinate to this five-fold division and ordained that poetic themes were to have a definite geographical environment as their background, and the imagery for each theme was to be taken from objects belonging to its appropriate region and from none other. The classification was valid for the "sea girt world" (*Tolkaappiyam,* 948).

If enmity between two chiefs had ended in one capturing

the cattle of the other as was natural in days when cattle formed the chief wealth of people, and if some bard or minstrel were to compose some poem in praise of the victor, according to the rules of the Tamil muse, he would have had to keep the mountain regions as his background, and base his figures of speech on objects found in those regions.[1] Or if he were to describe in some lyric the pining of a lady for her lover, her weariness and sorrow at his not being able to meet him, he would have had to take a *dreary and desert-like region of a midday of Summer* as the natural setting for his poetry, and draw his similes and metaphors from such objects as parched leaf-less trees, the burning rays of the sun, the deceptive mirage, and the elephant weary for want of water to quench its thirst.[2] Not only was the landscape prescribed but also the season of the year and the hour of day. Incidentally, this five-fold division throws great light on human origins and the development of human culture as has been observed by those geographers, and anthropologists, who have recently written at length on this subject.[3]

The perception with which the Tamils divided land into the five regions which form the environment of the five basic types of culture, and enunciated that since a different way of life was conditioned by each environment, therefore different types of poetry should correspond to the different regions is baffling both in its antiquity and singularity. It seems almost incredible that more than two thousand years before Le Play and the Regionalists, the Tamils could have focussed their attention on natural environment and on the nature-occupations which are the foundations of material culture.

While regional classification of the ancient Tamils should amaze present-day ethnologists and students of primitive cultures (so far not one scholar of note in the Western World

[1] T. especially 947-965.

T. 1002, where cattle-lifting is the *puram* counterpart of *Kuriñci*. See *Puram*; 262, 263. In the latter poem, the elephant and the swift-flowing river used as terms of comparison belong to the hills.

[2] E. g. *Kali*; 2-5; *Akam*; 1, 29.

[3] H.T. pp. 1-15; 63-83; 253-267. A. L. KROEBER, *Anthropology*, New York, 1948; RALPH LINTON, *The Tree of Culture*, New York, 1955; HUNTINGTON, E., *Mainsprings of Civilization*, New York, 1959.

has adverted to this ancient examination of cultural origins), their choice of names for these regions should be an indication of a high degree of classification of natural phenomena they had already then attained. It would have been natural for a primitive people to have chosen names for these regions from their most important agricultural produce, or from the chief occupation of the people. Instead, to signify the mountain regions they chose the *strobilanthus*, the flower of a plant that blooms once every twelve years on the hills of South India; to signify the pasture-lands they chose the white jasmine, the prettiest and most fragrant flower of the region; to signify the littorals they chose the species of water-lily that abounds in the lakes and tanks of the maritime tracts; to identify the agricultural riverine plains they chose the flower of the myrtle tree, a landmark of the locality; and to signify the desert jungle they chose the flower of the *paalai* tree, a tree that looks luxuriant even in the heat of summer.[4]

A complete and accurate study of Nature was, therefore, imposed on the Tamil poets by poetic tradition and rule. Poets of other languages were never compelled to make a study of flora and fauna, and the seasons, by the rules of poetics. They could have excelled in poetry without any such minute study and observation as was enjoined on the Tamil poets. Since most poems were classified according to region and landscape, it was imperative on the aspirant to the good graces of the Tamil muse to preface his literary attempts with a study of flora and fauna, and a detailed observation of the varied aspects of the vast domain of Nature by sea and hill and field and meadow and desert. Of these regions the Tamil poet had not only to study the visible phenomena or the several objects

[4] This nomenclature came into vogue decades before the Cankam poetry, we know, came into existence. Already at the Cankam period references to some of the regional flowers such as *kuriñci* and *paalai* are comparatively rare, and the origin of the nomenclature is mentioned by no poet. Hence the difference of opinion between the commentators as to these regional names originally signifying flowers, or trees, or the patterns of behaviour ascribed to the regions. The opinion of the earliest commentator, Ilampuranar that the regions were named after the flowers seems to be the most convincing. Marutam is *terminalia Eomentosa.*

(god, flora, fauna, music, occupation), found in or related to these regions, but he had as well to know what changes were introduced into these regions by the annual seasons, and how Nature manifested herself by day and night during these seasons. Thus the Tamil poet could ill-afford to neglect the study of landscape as seen during each of the six seasons of the Tamil year and during the six major divisions of the Tamil day.[5]

It has been already noted that Nature is featured as the setting for poetry in a different manner in the two classes of poetry, *akam* and *puṟam*. *Akam* poetry deals with imaginary situations based on actual life.[6] The poet may imagine himself to be bard of a queen conveying a message to the king in his encampment and narrating the sorrows of separation, and urging him to end the war victoriously to hasten back to his capital. Or he may imagine himself to be in the place of the hero, or the heroine, or the maid to the heroine, or her nurse, or her mother, and write poems as they would have written. The Tamil poet had at the same time to cultivate a dramatic element; and a power to characterize imaginary situations and compose poems in the name of the characters prescribed by convention. Hence, in the editions of poems that have come down to us, each poem has a colophon, inserted later by commentators to say to which category the poem belongs, and whose words or reflections are supposed to be contained in the poem. Thus the first poem of *Akanaanuuṟu* is entitled *paalai* meaning that the subject is separation of lovers and that the poem is to have a desert landscape as its setting. The colophon runs: "What a heroine said to her maid when she (the heroine) was unable to bear the grief of being separated from her lover". No names, however, of hero or heroine or other personages concerned in the plot, were to be mentioned in the poem. But the poet always writes in the first person, even when impersonating a character of the opposite sex. Thus in Tamil love-poetry one does not come across the direct per-

5 M. VENKADASAMY NATTAR, *Kapilar* (Tm), p. 31 ff, Trichinopoly, 1939.

6 T. 999. See Naccinaarkiniyar's and S. S. Bharati's commentaries in h. l.

sonal addresses like those of Catullus or Shakespeare. Though the sentiments are the same, the form of Tamil love-poetry differs widely. The Tamil poet of the Cankam period may be writing to his own Tamil lover, but convention binds him. He must take a topic out of the many provided in *Tolkaappiyam's* ample code and express his feelings through an imaginary situation such as "What the lover said to himself when separated from his beloved". The desire for anonymity and impersonal expression is a characteristic of ancient Indian poetry.

In *puṛam,* there is neither impersonation nor imaginary situation. A poet is free to express his thoughts and feelings and describe events in the manner he deems best, though his poems too are subject to the codification contained in the section of *Tolkaappiyam* pertaining to *puṛam* poetry.[7] Except for the five major divisions of warfare and their sub-divisions, which are made parallel to the *akam* regions, the treatment of Nature in *puṛam* poetry is in no way controlled, and is left to the genius of each poet.[8]

Nature and Man

Since a minute and accurate study of Nature was prescribed to the Tamil poet of the Cankam age, we find the poetry of that age very faithful to Nature. Stopford Brooke observes in his study of *Naturalism in English Poetry*: "There are two great subjects of poetry; the natural world . . . and human nature. When poetry is best, most healthy, most herself, she mingles together human nature and Nature, and the love of each. Human nature is first in poetry and Nature second but they must be together, if the poetry is to be great and passionate, simple and perceptive, imaginative and tender. It is a terrible business for poetry when it is wholly employed on man, or wholly employed on Nature. In either case the poetry becomes thin, feeble, unimaginative, incapable of giving im-

[7] T. 1002-1037.

[8] T. P. MEENAKSHISUNDARAN, *Collected Papers,* p. 35 f, Annamalainagar, 1961.

pulse or bringing comfort".[9] Stopford Brooke might have spoken of ancient Tamil poetry in these words, for the happy combination runs through all Cankam literature. The Tamil poets made man their greatest study, not man of one class or society, but *ideal man and universal man.* They were expected to be both psychologists and naturalists, and Nature was important to them only in relation to man. Nature was the stage on which the human actors came and went. It provided the background and setting for the drama of life, but was not a mere frame or mere background. It was a sympathetic background. The important aspect of poetry was the feelings, the behaviour, the conduct of man, but Nature served to show these themes in bolder relief by being portrayed as being in harmony or in contrast.

Professor Ryder writing about Kālidāsa says that the poet has achieved a wonderful balance in being both a poet of the human heart and of natural beauty. "The two characters unite in him, it might almost be said, chemically. The matter which I am clumsily endeavouring to make plain is beautifully epitomized in *The Cloud-Messenger.* The former half is a description of external nature, yet interwoven with human feeling; the latter half is a picture of a human heart, yet the picture is framed in natural beauty. So exquisitely is the thing done that none can say which half is superior. Of those who read this perfect poem in the original text, some are more moved by the one, some by the other".[10] The Tamil poets do not give that equal place to Nature which Professor Ryder sees in the works of Kālidāsa, but one acquainted with Cankam poetry, after reading these observations, would have reason to regret that scholars of the West are so unacquainted with ancient Tamil poetry. A familiarity with it should make their studies on the poetic interpretation of Nature gain in depth.

In Nature being the *sympathetic background,* it did not cease to be a store-house of similes and metaphors to the Tamil poets. In fact such minute study was imposed on them that, as a result, their bland fidelity to Nature and their truth-

[9] Stopford A. Brooke, *Naturalism in English Poetry,* p. 27.

[10] *Shakuntala and other Writings,* in "Introduction", London, 1933.

fulness of observation have become proverbial in literary criticism in this country.

The Western critic accustomed to the more recent literature of Tamil or Sanskrit is apt to consider the language of Oriental poetry highly exaggerated. The accusation is not altogether undeserved. But one of the greatest differences between ancient Tamil poetry and the later poetry, is the fidelity to Nature and the relative absence of hyperbolic conceits or descriptions. The fault is rather the other way about. The fidelity to Nature is sometimes so exaggerated as to become a literalism that stifles imagery and poetic expression. Besides, it is well to remember that each nation develops terms of comparison and modes of expression that may seem improper, indecorous or even unintelligible to foreigners. At times, the Latin poets, when describing prodigies and sacrifices, describe the morbid condition of the victim's viscera with a complacency entirely remote from the experience of English poetry. A literalism and realism of this nature, and a stereotyped set of comparisons, the result of an overfond loyalty to conventions, may be noticed here and there in ancient Tamil poetry, but these do not take away from it the remarkable and accurate beauty of the pictures it presents. Such recurring epithets and similes have to be understood in the same manner as the Homeric phrases, the "wine-dark" sea, the "ambrosial night", and the "long-shadowing" spear.[11] They are probably the relics of the poetry of an earlier age, and that is the explanation for the recurrence of the same similes, for instance, with regard to women's eyes, namely, the leaf-shaped tip of the spear, the *kayal* fish, the lotus, the water-lily, the split unripe mango, and the gazelle-gaze.

A reader is often taken aback at the accuracy and origi-

[11] C. M. Bowra, *Ancient Greek Literature*, p. 28, London, 1945.

Gilbert Murray says of the Iliad: "We often find, too, that descriptive phrases are not used so accurately to fit the thing described. They are caught up ready-made from a store of such things: perpetual epithets, front halves of lines, back halves of lines, whole lines, if need be and long formulae. The stores of the poets were full and brimming. A bard need only put in his hand and choose out a well-sounding phrase. Even the similes are ready-made". (*The Rise of the Greek Epic*, Second Ed., p. 258).

nality of the similes that the Cankam poets have drawn from Nature. The eyes of a shrimp are compared to the flowers of the margosa. The folded petals of the *gloriosa superba* are said to resemble hands joined in prayer, its unfolded petals seem to be the lights that Nature sets up after sun-down, and its sagging leaves resemble the walk of drunken men. The rosy soles of the tired bare feet of a woman are compared to the tongue of a panting dog, and the green grass on which lie wood-apples to a green carpet on which children have left their toys. The stag's horns are like twisted iron; and the lightning tears the veil of night. The white flowers of the *murunkai* which lie scattered are like the broken bits of foam on the sandy shore, and the cascade is like a sheet of linen. Cankam poetry is a naturalist's paradise in the manner in which stems of trees and leaves and flowers are described.

Though certain poets excel in the description of certain regions as Kapilar does in *kuriñci* poetry and Perunkadunko in *paalai* poetry, they cultivated a feeling for Nature in all her moods and in all her regions. It has been said that Vergil and the Latin poets do not exhibit any great passion for mountains. Quintilian represents the current feeling of his countrymen when he says, *species maritimis, planis, amoenis*—beauty belongs to countries that lie beside the sea, level and pleasant. Though this statement about the absence of feeling for mountains finds notable exceptions in Vergil and Horace, it is on the whole true. The Tamil poets could not afford to neglect any single region or manifestation of Nature because of the exacting manner in which every region was prescribed to serve the needs of poetry. They had a trained eye for a general view of landscape as well as for particulars. They delight in the sights and sounds of landscape and paint their word picture often with tiny descriptive words. They are as much alive as any Grecian or Roman poet to the babbling of the brook, the roar of the cataract and the swift flowing river. Describing the darkness of a mountain cave, a poet says that it seems as if Night itself were asleep within it.[12] Nearly every poem in the *Akam* group is like a painting with lovers to the fore and behind them the regional landscape.

[12] *Puram;* 126, 76.

Pathetic fallacy and apostrophes are not too common in Cankam poetry and the absence of these figures of speech are due to a realistic approach to Nature. Lines like these in which the river is said to be the tears of the mountain in sympathy with the heroine, are not too common either.[13]

There are short addresses to the ocean, to the cloud, to the sun and moon, to the bee, to the bird, scattered especially in *Kuruntokai* and the *Kalittokai*. Of all the apostrophes there is none so tender and full of pathos as the address by the poet to the jasmine quoted in the previous chapter.

But the sympathy of Nature is made through suggestion and suggestiveness. Two figures of speech, the allegory and suggestion are used to the greatest advantage by the poet. The allegory as used in *akam* poems is a characteristic feature of Tamil poetry. In the study of a Tamil poem it is necessary to understand not only what the poets say directly, but also what they subtly imply, and what they wish the hearer to understand as implied.

The Cankam poets did not confine their poetry to a special locality. They treated of all classes of men and women and of all regions they knew. Though their *akam* poetry deals with the ideal and heroic; though they take the best of a type as hero and heroine, a chief and the daughter of a chief, they are always conscious of the fact that in the exuberance of love, every lad is a king and every lass a queen. A study of landscape as was enjoined on the Tamil poets meant also a study of the occupations and lives of the people that were indigenous to the landscape. *Humani nihil a me alienum puto* was as much a motto to the Tamil poets as to Terence. A Tamil line deserves to be as famous as the Latin one of Terence.

Every village is my village, every man is my kinsman.
(*Puram;* 192, 1)

Therefore they did not treat only of kings and queens, cities and palaces. They found poetry in the fishers' lowly huts and in the dwellings of mountain peoples. The fisher-woman wait-

[13] *Nar;* 88.

ing for the fishing boats with the days' haul, or the fisher-children watching the fish being dried, the shepherds with their flocks, the lowly at their work, came in for as much poetry as the wealthy heroine of a mountain chief wandering over the hills gathering flowers with a number of maids to attend upon her. Even when they sang of kings or sang to kings, they pleased their hearers most, not by describing the palace, but by describing the people who were privileged to live under the king's protection.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORICAL AND ETHICAL INTERPRETATION

History and Nature

It is a favourite observation with writers on India to say that the "historical sense" is wanting in all ancient Indian literature. If by a "historical sense" is meant a sense that ought to have produced chronological tables, and authors like Herodotus and Livy who wrote to recount the deeds and facts of the past, then it must be admitted that little literature has come down to us from antiquity that warrants the existence of such works.[1]

Yet ancient Tamil literature abounds with allusions both to contemporary and past events. If even in the absence of works similar to those written by Greek and Roman historians, it has been possible to trace out a history of the Tamil people during the Cankam period, it is due to the historical references in Cankam literature.[2] Many of these references occur in love-poetry. This fact ought to prove to some extent how much folk traditions were held in regard. At the same time, it must be observed, that even these references were often made not only to praise the memory of great Tamil personages of the past, but also to eulogize contemporary patron-kings and patron-chiefs. For instance, a poet writes about the gossip in the locality regarding the courtship and clandestine meetings of a hero and a heroine. It may be that he has an actual "case" in mind, or it may be that he is just imagining a poetic situation. The poet would compare the widespread gossip and scandal-mongering "alar" of neighbours to some contemporaneous or past victory in battle achieved by a king or chief he admires, or from whom he has received bounteous

[1] Writers like P. T. SRINIVAS IYENGAR and K. N. SIVARAJA PILLAI have based their works entirely on this literature.

[2] The Sinhalese chronicles, *Dipavamsa* and *Mahaavamsa* are notable exceptions.

gifts, saying that the gossip was more resounding than the shouts with which the foes of his hero retreated in battle, or louder than the jubilant cries of his patron's soldiers when they cut down the "guarded tree" of his enemy. Or the allusion may be directly to historic exploits performed by the great heroes in the past.[3]

Apart from the purely historical allusions, Cankam literature contains also numerous passages in which the poets associate landscape with historical events and historical persons. This historical association in nature poetry is also to be found among poets like Vergil. English poets have used it in poems here and there. Byron's *Childe Harold* contains many passages where landscape evokes thoughts and reflections on the past, and Scott is famous for seeing his landscape always through historical association. The Tamil poets also saw the earth coloured by this historical association, but their manner of expressing historical association is worth noting.

The tresses of the heroine have a fragrance that floats in the breeze. The fragrance reminds the poet of the fresh sweet smell that emanates from parks and jungles on a morning when the *mullai* is in bloom, and forthwith he compares the fragrance of the tresses to the fragrance of the forest-reserve of one of his patrons, say Oori:

> *Her tresses smell like the fragrant breeze that blows having traversed through the forest-park of Oori of the liberal hand and the valiant chariot.*
>
> (*Kur;* 199)

The tresses of a heroine are compared sometimes to a flourishing river. The poet would compare them to the side bank of not any city, but often to the wavy sand dunes along the dry bank of a river, but one that the poet would like to extol, say the ford of the *Kaaveeri* at Uṛantai, the capital of the Cooḷas, or the banks of the Vaiyai near Kuuṭal.[4]

Potiyil, one of the peaks of the Western Ghats stands like a lofty sentinel in the southern portion of the range. The

[3] *Kur;* 328; 393; *Akam;* 36; 45; 209; 253; 256.

[4] *Puram;* 347, 5-6.

sandalwood that grows on this mountain and these ranges, has been always a favourite term of comparison with poets, including Kālidāsa. The hill would seem to have been included for sometime within the kingdom belonging to chiefs of the Aay family, the Aioi of the Greeks. The heroine is said to be as fragrant as the sandalwood, or the *veenkai* and *kaantal* of Aay's Potiyil, and cooler than its water-lilies.[5]

The eyes of a heroine are usually compared to *neytal* blooms or to water-lilies. But often the flowers are specified as belonging to the lakes or tanks of some historic place or famed ruler. Thus, in a poem of the *Akanaanuuṛu* collection, the eyes are compared to the neytal blooms of a maritime lake bordering the sea near Korkei, the emporium of the Paaṇṭiyas.[6] Paraṇar, in another poem of the same anthology, after having enumerated the various difficulties and obstacles that a hero has to overcome to keep a tryst with his heroine, concludes saying that they are as insurmountable as the outer defences and defence-forests of Tittan's Uṛaiyuur.[7]

Another poet compares the forlorn appearance of the heroine on learning of the impending departure of the hero, to the groves around the Kaaveeri which look desolate after the departure of the people who were feasting there:

> *Thy forehead is like unto the honey-smelling groves floored with white sand on the tender shores of the great river. After the March festival, under the dense trees rich with foliage and flowers, may be seen the ashes of fires kindled by those who have been feasting. As desolate as the grove without people art thou. Your shoulders, too, once resembling the elegant and stately bamboos that grow on the flanks of the Potiyil hill that belongs to the Paantiyan, master of the southern sea rich in peerless pearls, have also lost their pristine elegance.*
>
> (*Akam;* 137)

Numerous examples may be given of the brief but significant ways in which history and Nature and personal associa-

[5] *Kur;* 84. See R. CALDWELL, *Comparative Grammar, Earlier Traces of the Dravidian Languages;* p. 91 ff.

[6] *Akam;* 130. Cfr; *Akam;* 47, 69. See R. CALDWELL, op. cit., ibid.

[7] *Akam;* 122, 21-23.

tion are linked together by the Tamil poets in the composition of imagery.

Ethics and Nature

The Tamils are presented in the early classics as a hard-working and industrious people. The fertility of the soil was greater in the Cankam period than now, but was not so great as to require much less energy and industry on the part of cultivators than are required at present. Famine, drought, and poverty were not unknown either.

It happened that Nature compensated by providing an abundance of luxury goods in exchange for what she exacted by labour from the Tamils. The hills of Tamil Naad provided pepper, cinnamon and other spices; her seas gave pearls and red coral; her forests yielded metals and precious stones. Therefore, as early as historical records go, the Tamils have distinguished themselves as traders with Malaya, Java, and Campa; with Mesopotamia, Egypt and the Roman Empire to the West. They made the most of what Nature gave them, and their commerce and international trade added not a little to the wealth of their kingdoms.[8]

The Cankam age was also known for its spirit of warfare. The chiefs and kings fought intermittently among themselves, but they also developed at the same time a very honourable code of warfare.

Their commerce with foreigners, and their code of warfare made them develop ethical standards. Honesty, truthfulness, bravery, love of honour are virtues without which no people may distinguish themselves in trade or war. Mercy and sympathy are also qualities which are natural to those who have attained a position of permanent wealth, and to the warrior used to the miseries of the battle-field. Hence the repeated emphasis in Tamil literature on the right use of wealth by distributing it to the poor and the needy.

8 E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, Cambridge, 1918; H. T. *passim* on the trade of Tamil Naad with the rest of the World; Mortimer Wheeler, *Rome beyond the Imperial Frontiers*, pp. 141-182, Pelican Books, London, 1955.

Cankam literature has a considerable ethical portion if you consider the didactic poems as well as those that personify and illustrate virtuous deeds and alludes to virtuous persons. "Ethics in Cankam literature" would certainly form enough matter for a voluminous study. Here is a typical poem of four lines by Avvai, "the Tamil Sappho":

> Land whether it be high or low, cultivated or uncultivated may be called good not because it yields good crops, but because it yields good inhabitants.[9]

which is a typical comparison where a certain lover's words are said to be as faultless and true as the arrows shot by the archers of the army chief, Palayan.[10]

Tamil poetry abounds with passages in which the fertility of a region or kingdom, unfailing rains, well-watered rivers, abundance of birds and beasts and general prosperity are ascribed as the result of the righteous rule of the sovereign. The panegyric poems of the *Pattuppaaṭṭu*, the *Patiṛṛuppattu* and the *Puṛanaanuuṛu* are impregnated with this idea. The praise of a sovereign's rule meant the praise of the hills, of the rivers, and the general beauty and fertility of his kingdom.[11] Sometimes the panegyrics assume a language reminiscent of Vergil in the fourth eclogue. Describing the region of Iḷantirayan, the poet says, "in his land there are no marauders that attack wayfarers to rob them of their goods. Peals of thunder you will not hear; the serpent will not kill, nor the forest animals hurt. Proceed, therefore, as you will."[12]

When praising a sovereign, the roar of the ocean or the cataract, and the sound of thunder, are said to be the drums that announce his greatness. The heights of the mountains bespeak the heights of greatness achieved by him. The streams that descend the mountain sides may be seen shimmering silver-like from far and wide; they are the silver banners which proclaim his victories and his unrivalled prowess in war.[13] The waters even in the swiftest and deepest of his

[9] *Puram;* 187. [10] *Nar;* 10, 6-9.

[11] E.g. *Puram;* 143, 12; *Puram;* 231 ff; *Maturaikañci;* 105 ff; *Patir;* 28.

[12] *Perumpaan* 40-43.

[13] *Patir;* 69, 78; *Akam;* 162, 358; *Patir;* 70, 22; *Puram;* 126, 8.

rivers are so clear that ornaments which have fallen off from those sporting in the river may be seen lying deep down on the sands. The clear waters are an indication of the unsullied record of his rule.[14] This mode of praise occurs in the panegyric poetry, both in explicit terms and by suggestion.

Nature's reflection of ethical conduct is not due to the actions of the sovereign alone. It may be due to deeds of individual chiefs as well as the deeds of a people of the entire village. An amusing and significant poem of the *Kali* odes presents a young lady and her companion as apparently wondering that Nature could be so luxuriant in the country of her lover who has not kept his tryst. The inference is that since he has not kept his word he cannot be an upright man, and consequently Nature cannot appear lovely in his land.

> *Can the river glimmer! Can it truly glimmer in the land of one who is not true to his promises, who has not kept his word? Does the rain cloud wander? Does truly the rain cloud wander in the land of one who is the cause of wasting form?*

She continues to express her surprise in similar language about the other beauteous and beneficent aspects of Nature, for she would expect that the land of one who has been false to her would be deprived of Nature's beauty and Nature's bounty.[15]

Another poem in the same collection is an imaginary exhortation to relatives of a young lady not to refuse her hand in marriage to the brave young man who has rescued her from being swept away by the waters of the river. In rescuing her, he has had to clasp her to himself, and according to the Tamil code, it was but proper to get her married to the one who was first to touch her. It was the ancient ideal that a young lady should not touch or be touched by anyone else than the one who was to be her partner in life. The speaker who counsels her people threatens that, unless propriety is observed in this regard and the young lady be given in wedlock to the one who had clasped her for the first time—

[14] *Patir*; 86.
[15] *Kali*; 41, 42.

The valli will not yield its roots, the hilltops will not yield honey, the garden panicum will not thrive, because the mountain dwellers have observed that which is evil.

In the mountain summits which attract the eye, and where the gloriosa superba casts around its fragrance, the bows of the archers fail not, only because their wives are devoted single-mindedly to their sires.

The inference in the latter part is that the hunters in the hills will not be successful in obtaining food with the bow and arrow if they do not regard the traditional propriety regarding the wedlock in question.[16] Such is the power of chastity, that a chaste maid or a chaste wife could merit seasonal rains for her village.[17] Such is the power of the prayer of good men that their devotions bring rain when they are in need, and keep away the rain clouds when it threatens to rain in excess.[18]

Vergil enunciated a principle of poetry much in vogue among the ancients when he said that what is described ought to correspond to the dignity of the theme—*si canimus silvas, silvae sint consule dignae*. The Tamil poets took pains to describe everything noble even in the landscape of their idealized heroes. In love poems the heroes and heroines may be real or imaginary. The poet may have in mind actual incidents from life, or he may be describing incidents his poetic fancy has built up. The heroes and heroines are chiefly depicted as ideal persons, for Tolkaappiyar and the poets believed in another principle enunciated also by Aristotle, that a class is represented by the best of its type. They chose the best of the types they described, and the nobility of the landscape is always made to reflect the nobility of character of their heroes.

Descriptions and allusions to Nature contain historical references of a kind which allude to the goodness, gentleness and kindness of the historical heroes. When Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* refers to Valeria as—

Chaste as the icicle
That's curdied by the frost from purest snow
And hangs on Dian's temple,

16 *Kali*; 39. 18 *Puram*; 143, 1-3.
17 *Kali*; 19, 20; *Kali*; 39, 6.

he no doubt meant that snow, pure everywhere, becomes purer by association with the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the celebrated edifice in honour of the goddess of chastity.[19] The Tamil poets work in similar associations where possible. The eyes of a lady are compared to the round water-lilies. A Tamil poet would not be satisfied with any simile in general; he would want a historical simile. He would rather refer to the water-lilies growing in the region of a particular king or chief. This topical and specific setting served a double purpose, namely, to praise the region or its ruler, as well as to say that the flowers in the particular region would be lovelier because of the goodness and righteousness of the persons associated with it. The latter inference is derived from the historical allusion and the lesson is that the beauty of a landscape is commensurate with the moral beauty and ethical ideals of its rulers and citizens. While in *puṛam* poetry such assertions are directly made as may be seen in any panegyric poem, in *akam* poetry they are alluded or suggested as in the examples that follow.

The taste of water after eating the (*nelli*) gooseberry is sweet. However, the poet thinks that it will be sweeter after eating the gooseberry in Paṇṇan's orchard, for he is one who does not live for himself but for others.[20]

Paari, one of the last seven patrons of poets, had a picturesque lake in the hill territory of which he was chief. The water-flowers which bloomed there are sometimes objects of comparison. In a poem in which a lover is remonstrated for his coldness and indifference towards his beloved, the lady's nurse addresses, him in these words:

> *Once, even if my lady had offered you the green fruit of the margosa, you would have received it as sweetest sugar. But now, were she to give you even the clearest water of a January morning from the cool lake of Paari's hill, it might scald you and taste bitter. Such is your wavering love.*

Water on a January morning would be cool and crystal-clear in all lakes. Many lakes could have been taken as a term

[19] *Coriolanus*, V, III, 65-67. [20] *Akam;* 54.

of comparison in the Tamil country. But here the poet pays a compliment to Paari as well as teaches a moral lesson. Waters in Paari's territory ought to be clearer because he has a clear and unsullied record, and his lake is cooler because he refreshes with his giving all those who have recourse to him.[21] Similarly, the flowers of his lake are more fragrant, and the poet would compare the heroine's fragrance, not to any flower in general, but to the flowers of Paari's lake, or to the flowers that bloom on Sirumalai of the Paantiyas, or on the hill of Oori, the beneficent chief, or of Aay.[22]

Much that was ethical entered also into the world of Tamil imagery. A few examples will suffice for the present. The bee goes from flower to flower. Having spent the day among the aquatic flowers, when the sun sets and the aquatic flowers close their petals, the bee betakes itself to the blossoms on creepers and branches which flower at night. The bees that abandon the lotus and the water-lily in the evening for the jasmine and the *kaantal,* remind the poet of those who forsake the friendship of men whose wealth and influence are on the decrease.[23] Another poet imagines a trial of strength between a rogue-elephant and a tiger. To the bud-beetle the tiger's spots seem to be flowers of the *veenkai.* It flies to and fro between the elephant and the tiger, trying to taste of the elephant's rut, as well as of what it imagines to be the flowers of the *veenkai.* The beetle reminds the poet of those peace-makers who seek to bring together two contending armies or two opposing clans.[24]

For wealth of Nature imagery the *Kali* odes occupy a very prominent place in Cankam literature. In the *Kali* odes of the *paalai* class the sun is represented as cruel as a sovereign who, because of the evil influence of his minister, has become an unjust ruler. On the other hand in a *neytal Kali* where Nature is considered under a different aspect, the evening sun is compared to a victorious and virtuous king proceeding to another world to enjoy the fruits of his good deeds.[25]

Trees in the *paalai* region are said to be dried up like the

21 *Kur;* 19. 22 Cf. *Akam;* 47, 69, 78
23 *Akam;* 71, 1-4. 24 *Kali;* 46.
25 Compare *Kali* 13 with *Kali* 118.

tree under which has sat a man that hath borne false testimony.[26] They are also said to be devoid of fruits and leaves like a young man whose youth has passed a lonely existence. Like the petty-minded man whose wealth does not benefit those who approach him for help, and like the end of him that lives a life of wrong-doing which ends in self-destruction, the tree too dries up even to its very roots.[27] The luxuriant trees, on the other hand, that border rivers and tanks are suitable comparisons for those who flourish because they share their wealth with the poor and the needy:

> The trees on the well-watered river banks grew like the wealth of him that gives without stint, and lives a virtuous life doing no evil to others.
>
> (*Kali;* 27, 1-2)

> The trees were heavy with flowers like the bounty of him who realises the transitoriness of life.
>
> (*Kali;* 32, 11)

> Like the wealth of the bountiful man, the trees bloomed; like the effortless ease of those who enjoy the wealth of such a man, the bees sported among the flowers.
>
> (*Kali;* 35, 1-2)

The petals of the *gloriosa superba* (*kaantal*) are compared to women's fingers and the entire flower, especially before it has unfolded itself is compared to the two hands joined in an attitude of supplication. Trees and plants that are bent or dropping are compared to the bent head and humble posture of wise and learned men who have heard their praise spoken in their own presence.[28]

From animals too the Tamil poets learned wisdom. The hero as well as the heroine recall their own course of love when they observe what part love plays in the behaviour of animals. The elephant that strokes with its trunk the back of its mate or helps it to feed on bamboo shoots, the deer calling unto deer, the dove cooing unto dove, the buffalo, the crab, all these teach them or remind them of the intimacy and affection which should exist between those who are pledged to each other.

26 *Kali;* 34, 10. 27 *Kali;* 10. 28 *Kali;* 119.

CHAPTER FIVE

RELIGIOUS INTERPRETATION

Religion and Nature

Cankam literature, as it has come to us, contains various strata of development in the religious thought of the Tamils. We have evidence for totemism, for animism, for polytheism as well as for monotheism. Though there is a school of thought that believes categorically that the religious and spiritualistic interpretation of the world seems to have been a regular process from animism to polytheism, and from polytheism to monotheism, Tamil literature, on the other hand, would seem to substantiate the view of the rival school, that polytheism and animism are development posterior to monotheism. The belief in one God, Creator and Supreme Ruler of the Universe, was prevalent in Cankam times. There is a strong theistic trend proceeding from the earliest Tamil literature available. Dr. S. Radhakrishnan has himself observed that "contact with the highly civilised Dravidians led to the transformation of Vedism into a theistic religion."[1]

Besides the usual Cankam verses cited in support of the ancient Tamil belief in a personal Supreme God, the word *Kaṭavuḷ* itself, found in the earliest Tamil works extant, is proof of the Tamils having acquired early notions of God's transcendence and immanence. With regard to Nature, God is its Creator, and from him came the five elements and the worlds.[2]

A further proof of Tamil culture originating in the hills is the evidence of the development of their religious thought from the cult of Murukan. This cult of a Supreme God was

[1] S. RADHAKRISHNAN, *The Hindu View of Life*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1948, p. 22.

[2] *Nar;* 240, 1; *Puram;* 194, 5; *Lectures on Purananuru* (Tm), pp. 167-243, Madras, 1944; SWAMI GNANAPRAGASAR, *The Tamils, their early History and Religion*, o.c.; pp. 49-105.

in the hill regions associated with the beauty of Nature.[3] The word Murukan itself means beauty, youth, and godhead, and the ancient Tamils associated the godhead with perennial youth and beauty reflected in Nature. Since the knowledge of God developed among them in their first habitat, the hills, their worship and theogony were coloured by the environment in which they lived. Thus they called Murukan, even in his aspect of the Supreme Being, "Lord of the hill" for probably at the time they knew only of the hills as places of habitation. At first they seem to have worshipped God as revealed in Nature. Gradually, anthropomorphism entered into their cult, for nothing is so much subject to mutation unless jealously guarded by a teaching authority, as religion. They found that the rising sun which was the nearest vestige to His greatness and glory was red, and hence they called the God too Ceeyoon.[4] Since hunting was the primary and primitive occupation of the mountain tribes, they gave a spear in his hands, and called him the Spear-man or *Veelan*. When we examine the anthropomorphic evolution of the cult of Murukan, everything points to his having been originally and exclusively the deity of the hills. He rides the elephant, the strongest and most powerful of the animals of the hills; a bird associated with him is the peacock, a bird of the hills; among his symbols is the cock, a bird domesticated in the hills very early in history; his weapons are the spear and other tools mostly used by the hill-folk; and he is said to have married Vaḷḷi, a maid belonging to the hill-tribe. He is said to be as resplendent as the sun and burning fire, two objects more welcome in the colder climate of the hills than in the other regions.

His cult is indissolubly connected with montane Nature. The spots he chooses for his habitation, or for the manifestations of his greatness and for bestowing his favours upon his clients, are places where Nature is most alluring, such as—

[3] P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture*, p. 21 ff; T. V. Kalyanasundaranar, *Murukan or Beauty* (Tm), Madras, 1946; Swami Vedachalam, *The Tamilian Creed* (Tm), Madras, 1941.

[4] T.951. See M. S. Purnalingam Pillai, *Tamil India*, Chapters on Religion and Philosophy, Madras, 1945.

The wood and grove and enchanting islet
The river and lake and such other places,

and again

The banyan and katampu and riverine islet and mountain peak. . .[5]

In his worship, his devotees use the flowers of the mountain region such as the *gloriosa superba,* the red *ixora,* and other red flowers.

The rites connected with the worship of Murukan include offerings of the produce of the hill districts. The inhabitants of the hills make offerings of millet and honey, or millet mixed with the petals of red flowers and the blood of rams. A peculiar dance where the priests or the priestesses get into a religious frenzy formed an integral part of the ritual. In each place where he is worshipped he may bear a different name. He is said to visit these habitations in order to confer his graces, and to join in dance on his mountain abodes with the celestial damsels the sound of whose anklets fill the mountainside. His appearance on his peacock is like that of the rising sun over the brim of the ocean. He himself is decked with a wreath of red *veṭci* blooms, and garlands of flowers from his favourite tree, the *kaṭambu,* which is sacred to him, and from his ears hang leaves of the *aśoka.* His worshippers are not less fond of flowers and leaves than are the priests and priestesses who officiate in his sacrificial rites. They wear wreaths and garlands of the red flowers mentioned above, the priestesses in addition wearing around their waists, garments of intertwined leaves and flowers.[6]

The hill which was believed to be the special abode of Murukan was Tirupparangkunram near Madurai, the natural beauty of which is abundantly described in the *Paripaaṭal* odes and the *Tirumurukaaṟṟuppaṭai.* Tirupparaṅkunṟam today appears as an immense bare boulder, a landmark for all the

[5] *Tirumuruku;* 223ff; *Pari;* 3, 67 ff.

[6] These facts may be found passim in the *Paripaatal* on "Cevveeḷ" and the *Tirumurukaarruppatai; Kur;* 362. A confirmation of the literary evidence for the cult of Murukan is found from the finds at Aaticaynalluur in Southern India. See M. GOETZ, *India,* p. 34 f. London, 1959.

vicinity. But two thousand years ago it presented a more pleasing prospect with its wooded sides, its groves, its little rivulets in the rainy season, its pools for ceremonial and festive bathing, and its caves with their historic echoes.

It is comparable to the Himālayas, says a poet, for it is here that the gods congregate to pay their respect to Murukan. The pool is like the lotus-tank in which Murukan had his birth; the thunder of the clouds sound like the elephant on which he sometimes appears. The Vaiyai river too which flows near Maturai is said to be pre-eminently his river, for it was he who supplied it with prosperous waters.

His devotees revel in the newness of life and beauty that the hill wears after the first rains in August and September, when the tanks are filled with acquatic flowers; when the *konrai* hangs out on its branches its golden garlands, the *veenkai* bursts into bloom, the *gloriosa superba* unfolds its rosy fingers, and the bees and beetles make music like the strings of the lute, while the peacocks and peahens cry as if appealing to departed lovers to linger no more but return to their own.[7]

The *katambu* tree was the tree most sacred to Murukan. His spirit was supposed to inform the tree, and a particular *katambu* at the foot of the Tirupparaṅkunram hill was the object of great devotion.[8]

The pilgrims flocked to the hill from the city of Maturai. One feels that the particular poet has been under the influence of foreign literature when he exaggerates saying that the highway between Maturai and Tirupparaṅkunram was covered beyond recognition by the flowers alone that had dropped from the heads and garlands of the pilgrim crowds that had betaken themselves to the hill on a festive occasion, and the clouds of sandalwood smoke that rose from the fires of the suppliants hid the very sunlit heavens. On such occasions nature and art would vie in mutual emulation. Beetles droned in contrast with the sounds of the lute; the hum of dragon flies seconded the wailing of the flute; the roar of the running water echoed the reverberations of the drum sounded for the sacrifice; and while maidens swayed in sacred dance, from

7 *Pari;* 14, 1-10. 8 *Pari;* 19, 2, 104; *Perumpaan;* 75.

the trees, garlands of hanging flowers swayed back in return.

The tender shoots of green, the mouth-like acquatic flowers of purple, the finger-like petals of the *gloriosa superba,* the bunches of *veenkai* blooms and the natural festoons of blooms pendent on the branches of other trees, their multi-coloured variety and profusion on the grove-clad hill made the entire view equal the variety of colour seen in the eastern sky at sunrise.

The crowds were immense on certain festive occasions. The thousands of heads crowned with wreaths all along the highway from Maturai gave the impression to one on the hill of one long garland stretched along the road. When the Paaṇṭiya sovereign came with his retinue to go up the holy hill. the elephants and horses and chariots and their attendants at the foot of the hill gave the impression of a military encampment.

Murukan, even in puranic development, retains his character as a Nature-god. Among the many functions attributed to his hands which are twelve, he lessens the heat of the sun with one of the hands and bestows rain with another.[9]

In *akam* poetry, Murukan, as god of the hill region, is appealed to when young maids fall ill. Deliverance from ailments was thought to be attained by the offerings made by the priest and his frenzied dance. Dances formed an integral part of early ritual. The real sickness of the maids in *akam* poetry is love-sickness, and therefore, the maids laugh within their sleeves when taken to the temple or tree of Murukan. To obtain the husbands of their choice, or the grace of motherhood, women had recourse also to Murukan.[10] He was worshipped with tears, and prayed to for rain as well as for the gifts of children.[11]

When a portion of the Tamil people moved from the montane to the pastoral region, they took with them their belief in a Supreme God. In the pastoral region they became shepherds; they found Nature was quite different from what it was among the mountains. The pastures were green and

[9] P. T. SRINIVAS IYENGAR, o.c., p. 23: "Murukan has throughout the ages remained essentially a god enshrined on hill-tops, notwithstanding later affiliations with post-vedic mythology."

[10] *Kur;* 111, 214, 360, 362; *Akam;* 22. [11] *Aink;* 251, 257, 269.

hence they gave the name of Maayoon to the god whom they had called Ceeyoon in the mountains, and worshipped him under the guise of a shepherd as they had worshipped him in the hills as a hunter. Nature, and their primary occupation, determine the aspect under which this Supreme God is to be worshipped. The cult was not the result of a decision arrived at the time of settling down in the respective regions. They did not say to themselves on entering the pasture-lands, "Here we have come to meadows; they are dark-green; hence we shall call him the 'Dark-green one'; since we are shepherds, let us worship him as the shepherd *par excellence*". Rather, the cult of Murukan was transformed by being subject to the natural law of growth among a people to whom Nature was actually the background of their life, social and literary, as well as religious.[12]

When the Tamils entered the agricultural regions, they learnt settled life and the arts of government. The idea of kingship which originated in the pastoral zone was perfected in the settlements of the riverine valleys. Hence they called God the king or ruler, Veentan, and worshipped in Him the aspect of kingship, and the power to rule the clouds and bestow the rain on which depended their agriculture. They celebrated him as they would celebrate a sovereign.

In the maritime zone the blue expanse of the ocean was constantly before the eyes of the people, and hence they may have named God "The Coloured-One"—since he manifested his greatness in the ocean which was coloured. They worshipped him with the produce of the ocean, with fish, and performed their ritual cleansing by bathing in the sea.[13]

Paalai too was believed to be inhabited by a god or gods

[12] P. T. SRINIVAS IYENGAR, o.c., p. 25: "I therefore hold that the ancient god of the pastoral tribe evolved into Krishna, and not that Krishna of the *Bhagavad Gitā* deteriorated into a pastoral god in recent times".

[13] *Pattinappaalai*, 80–104, T. V. KALYANASUNDARANAR derives *Varuna* from the word for colour. P. T. SRINIVAS IYENGAR, H.T. p. 82 thinks that Ceeyoon and Kataloon may have been the Tamil names for Indra and Varuna. The Indra and Varuna of Aryan worship are entirely different. On the probability of Tamil influence on the Aryan cults see P.T.S. *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture*, p. 21 ff.

though *Tolkaappiyam* does not mention the special name of any god.[14] The earliest form of religion we know of the *paalai* dwellers is worship of heroes fallen in marauding expeditions. Stones bearing particulars about the name and greatness of the heroes were erected in their memory, and on days when their memory was commemorated, possibly on the anniversary days of their death, the stones were decorated with peacock feathers, garlands of red flowers and the weapons which they used during life.[15] Their life was a predatory one; victory in their expeditions was their goal, and hence their religious sentiments gradually developed into the concrete form of a goddess of Victory, *Korravai,* to whom offerings were made of the spoils won by plunder.[16] In *paalai* we see the revival of the cult of the Mother-goddess, an ancient Dravidian cult.

This was briefly an aspect of the religious evolution that took place in the Tamil Naad. The worship of God receiving a local colouring and a local name led later on to people conceiving each separate region as having a separate god, and the confusion was complete when puranic legend and Tamil superstition and folklore so combined as to bury the original truth under mountainous error. Tirumaal or Maayoon has been represented as a shepherd. The *Paripaatal* contains a few of the devotional odes that were composed in his honour, and gives us passages of exceptional beauty in which the god is said to inform the entire universe.

Poems with the pastoral region as background refer to him with great love and devotion. While the worship of Murukan in the hill region emphasizes an element of fear, the worship of Tirumaal emphasizes the element of love. In this difference must be seen also the impact of Nature, of the anxious life in the mountains for fear of wild animals in contrast with the life in the meadows. The shepherds and shepherdesses join in pastoral dances to worship Tirumaal to the accompaniment of the flute made of the bamboo or the elongated *konrai* pod.

[14] See P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, o.c. 21 f.

[15] *Puram;* 260; 264; *Akam;* 67; 131.

[16] See P.T.S. o.c.; *ibid; Journal of the Annamalai University,* Vol. XXI, p. 164.

The young maids of the pastoral regions pray to Tirumaal to obtain for them the husbands of their choice, and to Tirumaal also go married women temporarily separated from their husbands to pray for speedy reunion, and to worship him with offerings of the regional white *mullai* flowers and paddy grains. The inhabitants pray to him in the hour of danger, as for instance, before the ancient Tamil version of bull baiting.[17]

Tirumaal was worshipped in the pastoral regions but his shrine of pilgrimage in the Cankam period was *Tirumaal-iruñcoolai* (the dark, dense, or large grove of Tirumaal) situated on a sober range of low evergreen hills to the north of Maturai. This locality combines proximity to Maturai with accessibility and natural beauty, and was probably in origin a temple of the shepherds of the region.

Iḷamperuvaḷutiyaar, the author of the fifteenth *Paripaaṭal*, in his remarkable poem on this hill of Tirumaal, describes its beauties and invites men and women who cannot climb up to the shrine to worship even from afar the hill when visible to them. Even those who live so far away as not to be able to see it, might profitably worship the direction in which it is situated. Many are the mountains and hills, he says, whose greatness it is impossible to recount in verse. Of these, those which are instrumental in conferring blessings both permanent and transient are few indeed, but of these few the most outstanding is *Tirumaal-iruñcoolai*. It is of the same colour as Tirumaal himself, and therefore may be the object of worship. To reside at the foot of the hill is a privilege that might well form the motive for interpretation.[18]

The immanence of God in Nature is a truth that is often expressed in very poetic language in the *Paripaaṭal*. Some of the most beautiful concepts are couched in very delicate language. Tirumaal is everything, the moon, the sun, the cloud, the sky, the earth, and the Himālayas.

In the third *Paripaaṭal* occurs this passage, whose simple beauty no translation can ever hope to reproduce:

[17] See the concluding lines of *Kali*; 103-108; *Mullaippattu*, 8-10; *Netunal*; 43.

[18] See *Pari*; 15.

Of the fire, you are the heat; of the flower, you are the fragrance;
Of the stone, you are the lustre; of the word, you are the truth;
In virtue, you are the sweetness; in vigour you are the strength
Of the Vedas, you are the Arcanum; of the elements you are the
Source
Of the sun, you are the effulgence; of the moon you are the grace
You are All, and the essence of All you are[19]

Tirumaal inhabits every object of the universe and the universe itself is but a reflection of the attributes of Tirumaal:

In the sun is your ire and your brightness,
In the moon your mercy and your grace,
In the cloud is your largesse and your giving,
In the earth your conserving and your patience;
In the flower is your light and fragrance,
In the ocean is your appearance and praise,
In the sky is your form and your voice
In air is your unfolding and return.[20]

In the above lines, his ire of which the sun is a reflection, is only towards those who do not follow the path of righteousness, and the mercy and grace of which the moon is a reflection, is his benignity and favour towards those who love him. The earth supports and bears all things, and he supports the earth. The white flower of the *kaaya tree* has a radiance that is likened to him. His theophanies are in the ocean to which his greatness may be compared. He is formless and it is the immaterial spiritual eye that can see him. From the element of air he evolves into various beings and into air he returns with the cessation of these beings. He is also repeatedly affirmed to be in the objects perceived by the senses as well as in the elements; in fact, it is from him that the elements and the twenty-one worlds were evolved.

Though the *Paripaaṭal* is probably of later date than other Cankam works, these passages show the development of the concepts of God in Nature.

The God of the maritime tracts was *Varuṇan*. The manner in which he was worshipped is quite characteristic of the local

19 *Pari;* 3, 63 ff.
20 *Pari;* 4, 25 ff. Cf. *Pari;* 1, 42-48. See *Svetasvatara—Upanisad,* IV, 16.

colour that the cult assumed. The fisher-folk planted the horn of a shark in the sandy beach and offered gifts of fresh and salted fish, and bathed in the sea to rid themselves of their sins. The shark was associated with *Varuṇan* as the elephant was associated with Murukan. The shark was the strongest denizen of the deep with which they had to contend.[21]

Religion in the marutam was associated with festivals by river and tank in honour of Veentan who was the king of the region of sweet water. Since cultivation was very much dependent on the rains, the people conceived him as the rain-god and the master of the clouds. The rivers of Tamil Naad were fed by the rains on the Western Ghats and Mysore, and the freshes of the *Vaiyai* and the *Kaaveeri* were celebrated with festivals marked by large crowds and unusual enthusiasm. Offerings were made to him of toddy, of garlands and goats.[22] Flowers were used to such an extent in the celebration of his feast that it seems to have been known as the "feast of flowers."[23]

From the above facts it is obvious that Tamil religion was intimately connected with the Tamilian concept of Nature. Nature's great landmarks, such as the sun, the moon, the mountains, the rivers, and the sea enter into active relation with the development of religion, and the flora and fauna of each region become indispensable materials of theogony and ritual.

The rising sun, an object of worship with all primitive peoples, is alluded to as the orb that many people worship. Swami Vedachalam abduces the *kartikai* ("Feast of Lights") as a proof that the Tamils worshipped God under the aspect of light. Though his theory would require a more substantiated

21 *Pattinappaalai,* 85 ff.

22 *Akam;* 156. P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, o.c.; p. 27: "Besides he (Indra) was worshipped by the people (Tamils) with the fireless rites detested by the Aryas. . . . So great is the prejudice in favour of the North Indian origin of everything connected with religion that to claim the Indiran of Marutam as a Tamil god independent of the Indra of the Aryas is sure to raise as violent a burst of opposition as Indra's own burst of the thunder cloud". See *Cilappatikaaram;* Canto V.

23 *Patir;* 30, 15 f. *Anik;* 62, 1.

evidence, in the feast of lights must be seen an indication of the cult of the sun and fire.[24]

In the same spirit did the Tamils revere the moon. The conjunction of the moon with the Rohini asterism was chosen for the celebration of marriages, probably because of the clear moonlit nights that such conjunction assured, and young unmarried maids worshipped the moon.[25]

Since the cult of Murukan originated in the hills, it was held by popular belief that he inhabited the hill-sides, and the expression "god-habitating range" occur whenever there is mention of hills and mountains within the properties of a king or chief. Rivers and fountains or tarns were also believed to the inhabited by him.

The rivers in the Tamil country were objects of affection. In all the three kingdoms of Tamil Naad, even when the rains failed, the rivers were the sources from which the fields were irrigated. The lands on the banks of the *Peeriyaar*, the *Kaaveeri* and the *Vaiyai* could be sure of agricultural produce even if the rains failed in other parts of the country. In a land dependent on rivers for regular irrigation, rivers acquire an importance that they do not in milder climes of constant rainfall. The rivers of Tamil Naad were not considered the source of Tamil prosperity because they were navigable or because they were of strategic importance, but because their waters irrigated the paddy and sugar-cane fields and failed not even when the heavens failed.[26] Hence the poetry about the *Kaaveeri* and the *Vaiyai* is geater in extent and very different in outlook from the poetry about the "sweet Thames" and the "flavus Tiber".

Each of the Tamil kingdoms had a river which was the source of the kingdom's prosperity and therefore looked upon as the spouse or daughter of the royal line, the *Periyaar* of the Ceera line, the *Vaiyai* of the Paandyan and the *Kaaveeri* of the Coola.

When the season of the annual rains came and the monsoon

[24] SWAMI VEDACHALAM, o.c; p. 199. Cfr; *Nar;* 283, 6-7.
[25] *Akam;* 156, 239; *Kur;* 307.
[26] Cf. Silap; XIII, 198. See ROBERT BRITTAIN, *Rivers and Man*, Longmans, London, 1959.

broke, the freshes of the rivers were greeted by the people with almost religious enthusiasm. They were marked by ritualistic bathing and water-sports. The *Paripaatal* contains long poems exclusively devoted to the description of the *Vaiyai* in spate; and the detailed accounts of the water-sports, the crowds, the gossip and scandal which marked the feasting, seem so modern and remind one of books having some spa or city on the Riviera as their background.

The people who flocked to the river took with them prawns, fishes and crabs and dropped them in the river with cries of "Increase, Multiply"—*polika,* meaning that they should increase and multiply in the river, and that the river should be a source of fertility. They believed that this opportunity given to them to bathe in the waters of the *Vaiyai* was a special grace, and they prayed for the same grace in the next life.[27]

Young girls bathed early morning in the *Vaiyai* in the month of *Tai* (January), or in their local tanks or rivers, and prayed to Tirumaal in the belief that their penitential early morning baths in the chilly waters would merit them the grace of a loving husband.[28]

Superstition and Nature

The material from which anthropologists and ethnologists may draw evidence for their theories on animism, fetishism, totemism and worship of the spirits of the dead, is plentiful in Cankam literature. There is evidence for snake worship, for tree-worship, for hill-worship. The predominant evidence is for animism, but that animism too is of a simplified kind. It seldom or never considers the tree as having a soul of its own, but it conceives a particular tree as the habitation of a god or a spirit, and even the number of indwelling gods are not multiplied but almost limited to the four regional gods, and *Korravai* attributed as the goddess of *paalai,* the fifth region. Awe and fear before the stronger manifestations of Nature, before thunderstorms, lightning, dark nights or dark.

27 *Pari;* 10, 85 ff. The Commentator says that the prawns, fishes and crabs were made of gold.

28 *Pari;* 11, 86, 115.

glades, and umbrageous trees, probably originated the belief that evil spirits inhabited them, and they might hurt passers-by. An offering, prayer, a song would appease them.

Max Müller explains much in animism by superstition, a poetical conception of Nature, and especially by personification. He says that inanimate objects were conceived as active powers, and as such were described as agents by a necessity of language, without, however, predicating life or soul of them, for human language knows at first no agents except human agents. Hence animism was a state of thought reached slowly and not by sudden impulses. "What is classed as animism in ancient Aryan mythology", he writes, "is often no more than a poetical conception of Nature which enables the poet to address sun, moon, rivers and trees as if they could hear and understand his words."[29] This origin of animism cannot be said of Tamilian animism, for the practical realism and concretizing mentality of the Tamils, not often developed into personification and pathetic fallacy. Their poetical conception of Nature seldom led them to address sun, moon and stars as if they could hear and understand them. The apostrophes to objects in Nature are so brief and relatively few in Cankam poetry and occur only as rapid outbursts of a soul tense with emotion. They are hardly shown to be the result of study and reflection.

It may be reasonably believed that Tamil animism developed from the association of special trees, special plants, special animals, and other special objects with the worship of the regional God. As the plurality of aspects under which God was worshipped led later on to Murukan, and Tirumaal, Veentan and Varunan being considered separately and even rival deities, so too objects at first merely symbolic of these gods, at a later stage were considered to be habitations of these gods and given the reverence and worship due to the gods themselves. The hill, the colour of which resembled the colour of Tirumaal, had a sacred association which later developed into worship. Similarly the trees associated with the respective gods, or the flowers which were used in their worship came to be considered as places of their habitation. Old

29 See article on "Animism" in *Catholic Encyclopaedia.*

trees in dark glades and sombre spots were considered the dwellings of evil spirits. And when the gods and the celestials of the Āryan pantheon and the fertile and prolific animism of the North were introduced to the Tamils, more trees were chosen as symbolic of the new gods, or as the habitations of the puranic editions of the old ones.

The evidence in favour of the worship of trees is plentiful and it has been noted that most of the temples of the present day have some dried up trunk of a hoary tree as its cherished relic, and may have had their origin in the symbolic tree of the god worshipped in the temple.[30] Each village had a common or meeting place known as the *manṛam* or *potuyil,* a spacious square where the villagers would meet or recreate. This too became a place of worship because of the trees that were supposed to be the habitations of inferior deities which resided in the lower part of the trunk.

Any tree might come in for worship, the more hoary the tree the greater the probability of its being made the object of worship. In *Naṛṛinai,* there is mention of a palmyrah palm that has come to be associated with a god.[31] The banyan tree, probably because of its beneficent shade in the tropic sun, was credited to be the residence of superior deities like Śiva. In puranic theogony, Viṣṇu or Tirumaal is said to have been found incarnate on a banyan leaf that was afloat on the waters, and Śiva expounds his teachings seated under a banyan tree. The expression "Aalamar-kadavul" the "god of the banyan throne", is often found in the classics with respect to these two gods. The banyan and other trees acquired increased sacredness if situated on the shores of lakes or tanks to which people resorted for bathing or ceremonial ablutions.

The margosa tree, probably because of its medicinal properties, was credited with marvellous powers and was symbolic of *Kaali,* godess of *paalai.* Its leaves, if hung athwart the portals of a dwelling, were supposed to prevent the entrance of evil spirits. Such evil spirits were also warded off by hanging the leaves of the *irvan* (the *serpent-champak*), and by

30 G. SUBRAMANIA PILLAI, "Tree Worship and Ophiolatry in the Tamil Nad", *Journal of Annamalai University,* Vol. XII, p. 70 ff.

31 *Naṛ;* 303.

the burning of white mustard. Soldiers wounded in battle were said to be particularly liable to attack by evil spirits, and references in the *Puranaanuuru* speak of the leaves, the smoke of burnt mustard and the Kuriñci music on the *Yaal*, that kept away the evil spirits from wounded soldiers.[32]

The trees, or rather the gods that were supposed to dwell within them, were worshipped according to customary ritual. Offerings of balls of rice and flesh were made on the altar that would be sometimes erected at the foot of the tree. The crows would preferably congregate their nests in the vicinity and feed themselves on these offerings, and at night the hoot of the owls provoked fear in the hearts of the neighbourhood.[33] A peacock which has eaten the millet soaked in liquor offered to Murukan, is said to dance like the priest of Murukan his ritual dance.

The *maraam* tree or sea-side Indian oak *Barringtonia racemosa* was said to be the habitat of a deity adored with great awe and reverence, because it was believed to chastise evil-doers. Probably it was this idea of chastising the wicked that made the ancients plant the memorial stones of heroes fallen in battle or frontier fray preferably beneath the shade of these trees.[34] The god would continue to chastise their enemies as their heroes had done while alive. That these gods were not merely terrifying deities, but were also believed to assist and help those who had recourse to them is apparent from such lines as these in *Kalittokai*, where the men worship them before engaging in the bull-fights peculiar to the Tamil country.[35]

Omens were sought in trees, birds and sounds. Kings who set their armies on the march for purposes of invasion or battle sought an omen in the *Unnam* tree. If its leaves were green and flourishing, the moment was considered propitious, but if its leaves showed signs of withering or the leaves were shrivelled, the moment was inauspicious for starting on such a campaign.[36]

Birds were the commonest objects of Nature by which good and bad omens were discerned, so that "to discern birds"

[32] *Puram;* 98, 281, 296. [33] *Nar;* 83, 281, 243; *Akam;* 287.
[34] *Kur;* 87; *Malaipatu,* 395 f. [35] *Kali;* 101. [36] *Patir;* 23, 40, 61.

meant in the Cankam period to look for good omens, just as the Latin *aves spicere*, came to mean everything auspicious. The Tamils, like the Romans and Greeks, considered birds which gave omens by their flight (*alites*) and birds which gave omens by their cries (*oscines*). The omen was good or bad according to whether the bird one met or heard was good or bad. Thus the sound of the crow was considered a good omen, while the sound of the owl was a bad omen. If at a certain time a new bird came in, or a bird flew away it was considered a bad omen.[37]

The crow from time immemorial has been known to be a bird of happy omen. When it caws rather noticeably near a dwelling, the sound is even now understood to announce a coming guest. Two references to this auspicious herald are of interest. A lover, on his return from foreign strands, thanks the playmate and companion of his lady love for having consoled her during his absence. The playmate replies that it was not she but the crow that restored her wasting form by announcing his impending return.[38]

> *The rice boilt of the fields of Tonti mixed with the ghee from the herds of the herdsmen of the pastures of valiant Nalli, even if served in seven plates were but poor offering to the crow that announced her visitor to my mate of languishing form.*
>
> (*Kur;* 210)

In the other poem, a mother who has had the misfortune of knowing that her daughter had eloped with a young man, entreats the crow in her anxiety to announce the return of the prodigals.

> *Black crow of spotless plumage! In a golden plate, with green cereals and raw flesh will I feed you and your offspring, if you will but caw the return of the five-fold tresses (i.e. heroine) and the fierce youth of the valiant spear.*
>
> (*Aink;* 391)

These omens, however, were not always rigorously observed. The bravery of kings is sometimes extolled by saying that they set out to battle in spite of adverse omens, and secured vic-

[37] *Puram;* 20, 18. [38] See T. 982; 1037.

tory. A king is praised as "enemy of the *Unnam* of slender trunk", meaning that he is not one to desist from his purpose even because of inexorable omens; and another is said to have warriors that care not for the bad omens from birds. The latter king was therefore styled "an enemy of birds" for he would set out to war and achieve victories even when the bird-omens were against him.[39]

Even voices or words or mere sounds heard at the time of a decision or during a conversation were interpreted in relation to the matter under deliberation. For instance, in the idyll *Mullaippaaṭṭu,* the queen is pictured as suffering in silence, for her lord has not returned from the wars at the appointed season. Her maids therefore repair to the local temple, make offerings of grain and jasmine buds, and await some "sign" concerning the return of the sovereign. As they stand with hands joined in prayer, a cow-herdess from a neighbouring stable, while trying to keep in control the calves that are restless for their evening feed, says loudly to the calves, "Your mothers will soon return to the fold driven in by the cow-herds". The praying maids take these words to be a good omen, and therefore an indication that the sovereign will soon return.

The chirping of the lizard is considered to this day to be of good omen. A poet imagines a wild-boar as awaiting the chirping of the lizard in order that it may proceed with a good omen on its predatory rounds.[40]

Religion and superstition and animism of the Cankam period offer material for a more discursive study. It has been the object of this chapter to point out only how far they affected the concept and interpretation of Nature poetry.

[39] *Patir;* 61, 6; *Puram;* 68, 11.
[40] *Akam;* 88.

CHAPTER SIX

THE FIVE-FOLD DIVISION

The Five Regions

The poetic interpretation of Nature in *akam* poetry and to a certain extent in *puram* poetry, was determined by geographical and climatic conditions prevalent in the Tamil land.[1] It would be worth attempting to trace the historical origin of this poetic convention. But before presenting the explanation, it is necessary to state the convention in full together with the remarks of the commentators.[2]

The Tamils, as we have indicated before, at the time of Tolkaappiyar, had already divided the landscape of South India and consequently of the world, into five types. The mountains, hills, and hilly tracts such as those covered by the Palani hills, the Nilgiris, and the Western Ghats, they termed *Kuriñci* after the name of a flower (*strobilanthus kunthianus*) which was one of the most significant of the flora of the region, blooming as the plant did only once in every period of twelve years. Since the plant was to be found only in the hills, and since

[1] Cfr. G. Grose-Hodge, *Roman Panorama*, Cambridge, 1946, p. 13: "Geographical environment has a profound influence on racial characteristics. History is governed if not determined, by Geography."

[2] Tolkaappiyar has stated clearly the rules governing the use that poets are to make of Nature as the background of poetry; and the conditions governing the dramatic situations which they are to imagine. By the time the commentaries that have reached us were compiled, the historical origins of his literary legislation seem to have been forgotten since several centuries had intervened between the period of Tolkaappiyar and the period of the commentators. Hence their explanations, especially those of Naccinarkiniyar, which aim at showing the congruity of prescribing a certain kind of landscape and a certain season for a certain type of poem, or to show the propriety of certain other rules, are not in every case convincing. They are, however, not to be neglected in any attempt to explain the *rationale* of Tamil poetic conventions.

even in the hills its flowering was not annual but once every twelve years, and since its flowering made beautiful gardens of entire hill-sides when the landscape for miles and miles would be covered with millions of these plants bearing dense clusters of flowers fluttering and dancing in the breeze, it is no wonder that the hill-sides were named after a flower so characteristic of the region.

The pasture-lands, such as the meadows between Trichinopoly and Madurai, the Salem and Coimbatore districts, and the half-jungle and half-shrubbery extending about Chettinaad, they termed *mullai,* after the fragrant white flower that the September rains bring into bloom in these parts. The agricultural zones such as those of Coola Naad, where the level country extends to the horizon, a sea of green fields broken by canals and tanks, they termed *marutam* after the flower of the myrtle tree, one of the loftiest of trees in the landscape and invariably grown on banks of rivers and tanks. The maritime zones were known as *neytal* after the flower of an aquatic plant found in abundance in the back-waters and water-logged tanks and lakes of the coastal regions. The fifth region called *paalai* designated all desert-like regions.

The desert as is understood of Gobi and the Sahara, even in a miniature scale, does not exist in the Tamil country. What the ancient Tamils meant by the term *paalai* is forest and jungle and land belonging to any of the other regions, especially montane and pasture-land, which because of the want of seasonal rains, or because of natural aridity, has become temporarily desert-like in the summer season. This temporary desert may occur in tropical climates even on the mountains, for when the mountains become subject to aridity, the heat and the general aspect of parched and desolate Nature is even more evident on the mountains than in the plains. Similarly the pasture-lands of the Tamil country are far from being the evergreen grassy meadows of Western poetry. They occupy the half-hilly and rocky portion of the Tamil land, where there are grasses as well as shrubs and jungle to serve as food for the flocks. But this land too in the season fixed by convention for "desert-poetry", from mid-April to mid-September, if rains should fail, becomes a very dreary land-

scape.[3] The aspect of general aridity may even occur earlier in the year in some parts of what was then the Tamil country. The name for this region *paalai* comes from the flower of a tree which is found in the jungle, and which bears its fruits in the summer season when other fruits and flowers are rare. The tree is not common in South India, now, but is to be met with in profusion in the jungles of what is part of the Tamil Naad of Ceylon, the northern portion of the Island. The *paalai* tree is a characteristic feature of this region as well as of the warm months of the year, when its fruits seem to be the only relief to animals and way-farers across the jungle.[4]

According to the literary legislation governing ancient Tamil poetry, each one of the five regional landscapes formed the background of poems dealing with definite groups of subjects of love and warfare. In *akam* poetry, a poet wishing to write a poem on love regarding the union of lovers, their first meetings, their nocturnal trysts, their conversation among themselves or with the maid, the companion of the heroine, had to choose the mountain scenery as the background of his poems. Having located the scene of his poem in the mountains, he was not free to choose his setting in any season of the year. Of the six seasons of the Tamil year he had to choose the season of the coldest part of the year, the most rainy, and the most beset with difficulties. These two were the most characteristic months of the mountain regions when mountainous climate is most itself, namely, during the two lunar months October and November, corresponding approximately to mid-October to mid-December, of the solar year. Neither was he free to describe his subject or his characters with any of the six divisions of the day of twenty-four hours chosen as the scene of his poetic setting. He had preferably to choose a setting at mid-night. Thus the *kuriñci* region formed the background for "union and related aspects."[5] Courtship was the theme of poems with montane scenery as background, since the hills more than any other region afforded oppor-

[3] *Cilappatikaaram;* Canto XI, 60-66.
[4] *T. Ilampuuranar, Porulatikaaram,* 5.
[5] T. 952.

tunities for secret and clandestine meetings, at least according to the commentators.

The opposite in *puṛam* poetry to *kuriñci* was *veṭci*, and due to early and primitive association, meant the initial stage of warfare, forays and frontier raids made for the purpose of cattle-lifting. *Veṭci* is the name of a flower, again indigenous to the mountain region, the *ixora coccinea*, and cattle-lifting came to be designated by this name, because the Tamil warriors adorned themselves with wreaths and garlands of these red flowers whenever they set out on cattle raids.

In fact, each strategic movement, or aspect of war, had its own particular flower after which the movement was named. The garland was symbolic of the character of the undertakings, and the feelings of those engaged in them. A verse of a later epoch says that the soldiers setting forth decorated with the *ixora* seemed as if the rosy evening sky were moving.[6]

Commenting on the use of flowers by the ancient Tamils for warfare, Dr. Pope observes: "This is to us a novel form of the language of flowers. . . . These garlands were intended to strike terror into the eyes of the opposing hosts, and to some extent supplied the place of military uniform. The armies of Europe have never been unmindful of the moral effect of the soldier's head-dress; though it would be a novel experience if our troops went forth to war like a marching garden of flaming and fragant flowers."[7] The author of *Paṭṭinappaalai*, describing Karikaalan on the battle-field decked with appropriate flowers and leaves, compares the king to a hillock overgrown with shrubs.[8] Apart from the aesthetic and natural love of flowers which the Tamils shared with the Greeks and Romans, it is not unlikely that the abundance of wreaths and garlands used in warfare and in ordinary life, served to keep the body, especially the head, cool, and was a medicinal protection against the sun. The purpose for which sandal-paste was used to give fragrance and to reduce the body temperature, or the sensation of heat seems to have been also the purpose for which wreaths and garlands were used in such profusion.

[6] *Purattiraddu,* 752. [7] *The Tamilian Antiquary,* No. 6, p. 5.

[8] Cfr. G. Soutar, *Nature in Greek Poetry,* London, 1939, p. 47, where a similar comparison of Homer is noted.

The other four kinds of landscapes were prescribed as settings for poems dealing with separation of lovers. This separation might take place during the pre-nuptial or the post-nuptial period. During the pre-nuptial period, because the meetings of hero and heroine were clandestine as far as the heroine's near relatives were concerned, it was but natural that the hero could not meet the heroine except by previous arrangement when the parents and brothers would not be about the trysting place. Both in the pre-nuptial and the post-nuptial period, the hero might depart on long journeys for various reasons. He might part in order to acquire wealth, an indispensable commodity for the ideal of an altruistic and philanthropic life. He might part, gallant warrior as he is, to enforce peace between warring princes, to help the helpless, or bring comfort to the comfortless. He might part to visit his subjects or his subordinates, to bring them timely succour; or he might part to acquire learning.[9]

What were the psychological reactions of the heroine and the hero during these enforced or voluntary separations? Though the hero's feelings are also considered in the poems, poets take more into account the heroine's sufferings as they are undoubtedly greater and more attractive to the subject of poetry. Further, it would be unheroic to depict the hero as pining and sorrowing to the detriment of the many tasks he has to accomplish. In the event of the period of separation being short, the heroine might bear it with resignation. The pasture-land was the appropriate setting for a poem of this nature. The author of such a poem, of the annual seasons, had to choose the season of the clouds, mid-August to mid-October, and of the divisions of the day, the evening or the dusk.[10]

The Indians, by custom based on expediency and climatic conditions, did most of their travel and even completed their wars before the setting in of the cloud-season and the monsoon rains. The hero before he sets out on his travels or his wars mentions to the heroine that he will return before the coming of the cloud-season. The clouds gather; the first rains set in; the *mullai*, a common feature of the landscape, unfolds its buds at dusk filling the vicinity with its fragrance, the

[9] Cfr. Commentaries on T. 971-981. [10] T. 952.

konṛai (cassia fistula) hangs out its golden garlands, but the hero does not return. It is here that the heroine manifests her virtue by awaiting her hero's return in patience, suppressing her grief and the tendency to complain against her lover. Since there is virtue in her patient and faithful waiting, the *mullai* flower came to designate chastity itself.

The period of day prescribed for this class of poems is evening, to be more exact, dusk, the hour when the sunlight is fading and night prepares to spread her mantle over the earth. Hence the dusk is called in language reminiscent of Shelley, the "filmy-eyed." The melancholic aspect of this hour, its power to evoke thoughts of dear ones and forgotten memories, has been mentioned by poets of all nations. Gray, in his Elegy used it to advantage, and Dante immortalized it before him in his *Divina Commedia* when he wrote:

Era già l'ora che volge il disio
ai naviganti e' intenerisce il core
lo dì c'han detto ai dolci amici addio.

It was the hour that turns back the desire of those who sail the seas and melts their heart, that day when they have said to their sweet friends, adieu, and that pierces the new pilgrim with love, if from far he hears the chimes which seem to mourn for the dying day.[11]

The choice of this hour of day for this class of poems was eminently suited to match the emotional reaction in lovers that mourn *lo dì c'han detto ai dolci amici addio.*

The section in puṛam poetry corresponding to *mullai* was *vañci*. It is the name of a yellow flower and shrub (*Hiptage madoblata*) "handsome when in full blossom with its profuse trusses of white and yellow fragrant flowers, somewhat resembling the horse-chestnut."[12] It denoted the strategic movement in which a king who wishes to conquer another's country resides in a temporary military camp pitched within the

[11] Il purgatorio, Canto, 8, 1 ff.
BYRON, *Don Juan,* III, 108:
Soft hour! which wakes the wish and melts the heart . . . seeming to weep the dying day's decay.

[12] *The Tamilian Antiquary,* ibid; p. 19.

jungle defences of his enemy. Since patience is common to both these *akam* and *puṛam* divisions, and since the encampment is situated within the defence jungles which belong to the pasturage type of region, *vañci* was made to correspond to *mullai*.

The littorals or the maritime tracts of sandy territory lying on the western and eastern sea-board of the then Tamil country, were called *neytal*, after the flower of an aquatic plant common in the water-logged tanks and lakes of the region. One should not imagine the *neytal* territory as the small strip of sand along the sea coast. It included all the sandy territory that extends sometimes three, four, five miles into the interior. The maritime region was the background for *akam* poems dealing with the pining of the heroine in the absence of her lord.

While the pasture-lands formed the natural scenic background for the virtuous and patient support of a lover's sorrow at separation from the beloved, the littorals represented, not any virtuous patience but actual pining and sorrow at separation. The topic of the *neytal* class of poetry is "pining and its related states". The pasture-lands represent an attempt at a stoic attitude, but the littorals represent the more human aspect of a lover's sorrow and grief, irrepressible tears and uncontrollable lament.

The differences between the *mullai* and *neytal* poetry are not far to seek. The pasture-land poetry takes into account only the rainy season of the year and the hour when day passes into night. But the maritime poetry may have any of the six seasons of the year as its season. Tolkaappiyar makes no mention of any annual season, and the poetry that has come down to us speaks of waves and winds of different seasons of the year.[13]

As regards the period of day, Tolkaappiyar uses an equivocal word which might mean either sunrise or sunset.[14] But considering the fact that nearly all the poets have described in their poems of this nature only the hour of sunset, com-

13 *Lectures on Narrinai* (Tm). *Neytal* by A. BHUVARAGAM PILLAI, p. 55f.

14 T. 954.

mentators have been led to take sunset as the hour of day for the *neytal* poems. Sivagnana Munivar alone among commentators differs from the traditional view, but his opinion in favour of sunrise as the hour meant by Tolkaappiyar is hardly tenable.[15]

The Tamil poets had a long sea-board, roughly from Cranganore in the West all down to Cape Comorin, and up again to Madras in the East, as the maritime zone marked out for the landscape of *neytal* poems. This territory is diversified by innumerable lakes, backwater courses, and sand-logged tanks. Its flora is most peculiar. The water from the sea, and rains tend to multiply the number of temporary lakes in which aquatic plants flourish. Luxuriant copses of mangroves and laurels stand in green relief against the white of the sand-dunes and sea-shores. Where the inlets and creeks abound, the branches of the trees hang over the waters that mirror them. Where salt is made, the land is divided by small ridges and looks like fields in the agricultural region. Hence the salt makers of this region have been called "non-ploughing ploughmen". Great cities and emporia and harbours were situated along these coasts during the period under survey. These shores were empires and the sea-faring peoples, both fishermen and mariners, made outstanding contributions to the trade, wealth and prosperity of the Tamil kingdoms.

The commentators do not elucidate the reason why the littoral poetry as well as the poetry of the arable land do not have any single annual season assigned to them. Their explanation is that the emotional reactions denoted by this landscape may also occur in more than one season.

For the expression of grief and sorrow, sunset forms an apt background, especially when it sets to the accompaniment of the dirge of the ocean. There is not much of difference between the dusk or evening prescribed for *mullai* poetry and the sunset prescribed for *neytal* poetry, except that one is considered as it appears during a definite season of the year in the pasture-lands, and the other as it appears all through the year on the littorals.

In *puram* poetry, the littorals are the venue of pitched bat-

[15] *Lectures on Narrinai*, o.c.; pp. 56, 57.

tles. The division is known as *tumbai* from a sea-side flower (*leucas linifolia*). Commentators have usually explained the propriety of this division by saying that clear, level and open land is necessary for pitched battles, and that such places are obtained only in the maritime tracts. An additional reason too may be advanced, namely, that in the old days, most of the attacks or invasions of the Tamil kingdoms were made by sea, and that most of the historic and memorable battles were fought on the beaches. Just as articulate sorrow is the keynote of *neytal,* so is it also the keynote of this *puram* division, since pitched battles result in loss of lives on both sides, and those who fall in battle are mourned by the respective armies and by all those who see the battle-field after the conclusion of truce.[16]

The *paalai* regions were symbolic of long separation, and while *mullai* represented the heroine's virtuous suppression of grief, and *neytal* the pitiful expression of grief, the *paalai* represented the pangs of long separation and emphasized the element of fear and anxiety that one experienced as a result of separation. Between these three regions there is a progressive length of separation, a progressive element of danger, and consequently progressive sorrow. The explanation is partly historical. In the *kuriñci* region, the men might leave their homes ordinarily to hunt, but they would not be out of home for long. Hence that region was eminently suited to represent meetings and union of lovers. In the pasture-lands, the shepherds invariably spent the whole day in the grazing grounds, and would return home only for the night. During certain months, they had to lead their flocks to distant pastures, and consequently spent longer periods away from home. The seaboard represented longer separation than the pasture-land because the fishermen went a fishing at night, and were involved in an occupation that contained greater element of danger. Further, the Tamils were great seafarers, and their commercial expeditions lasted weeks and months.

The *paalai* was representative of the longest and most dangerous separation, as the journey of separation was supposed to lead through unknown regions further than the limits of

16 T. 1015.

the Tamil land and through forests infested with wild animals. That *paalai* was understood to be more dangerous and more fearful than *neytal* which implied long voyages across the ocean, is probably explained by the fact that the land journeys across the Deccan forests, the home of ferocious animals and wild tribes, were considered more pregnant with danger than the voyages over familiar waves with familiar winds to guide them.

The yearly seasons allotted to *paalai* were early summer and the advanced summer and by exception, also the late dew season, for these are the seasons during which the heat of the sun dries up vegetation and creates temporary deserts.[17] To make the scene even drearier and more desolate, the period of day allotted to *paalai* was mid-day when the sun is blazing warm. As an appropriate setting to the poetry on separation, the desert is most appropriate because it symbolizes the dreariness of the heart within.

The *puram* division corresponding to *paalai* is *vaahai* named after the white crest-like flower of the *vaahai* tree, the *mimosa flectuosa,* one of the shadiest in the landscape, but dreary-looking in summer. The significance of this division is victory achieved in war or in any of the other laudable walks of life, victory that entitles one to the praise and glory of his fellow-men. The *vaahai* garland was worn by armies when they returned victorious from the battle-field. The reason for the choice of the desert was, as the temporary desert may occur in any of the other four regions, victory too may be obtained in any of the other four strategic movements. While the other four *puram* divisions are exclusively limited to warfare, the *vaahai* division extended to the victories of both war and peace, and could include also any eulogistic poem.[18]

Lastly, there is the separation that takes place due to courtezans, which results in a "wife's sulkiness." The misconduct of the husband may be real, or it may be an unfounded suspicion on the part of the wife, but since ill-temper due to jealousy plays a large part in the course of conjugal love, it was allotted a division by itself. To it was prescribed the *marutam* or the agricultural plains. The Tamil cities and capi-

[17] T. 955, 956. [18] T. 1019; 1020, ff.

tals of old were situated mostly on the banks of rivers in the plains. The Tamils recognized that harlotry was a feature more of cities than of villages. Since marital infidelity was the chief cause of discord in the harmony of love, this region was taken to designate all the unpleasant aspects of family life, aspects, which nevertheless, brought about a renewal of love. No season of the year was allotted to it in particular as misunderstandings between husband and wife might occur in any or every part of the year. Periods of the day were, however, prescribed for *marutam* poems, namely, sunrise, and the hours immediately preceding sunrise when the birds commence to chirp and all creation begins to stir.[19] The reason given for the congruity of these hours in *akam* poems of the *marutam* class is that these are the hours when infidel husbands sneak into their homes.

The *puram* counterpart to *marutam* is *Uliñai.* It denotes the military movement by which soldiers surround a city and attack the wall defences. The movement got its name from the wreath worn by the army. It was made of the flowers of the *oerva lanatar* consisting of "garland shoots". This seems to have been worn as a sign of derision, implying the worthlessness and weakness of the fort they went to seize.[20]

On the other hand, those who were besieged, wore the flowers of the *nocci* (*vitex nirgundi*) of pale-bluish colour and pleasant fragrance. Poets have sung of this flower with a great liking, praising it as a flower to designate the "virgin ramparts", virgin because scaled by no enemy. Here is a free translation by Dr. Pope of a poem regarding the *nocci*:

Like linked gems are nocci's curling ringlets blue
Mid all the flowering trees is none whose tender hue
So fills the soul with love as thine.
Men see the youthful maiden's slender form ensheathe
In the wide guarded city,—sight beloved of all;
And when fierce armies attack the moated wall,
The warriors on their brows thy flowers defiant show.
As sign they shield their virgin fort from every foe.[21]

Since cities were mostly situated in the riverine plains, *uliñai* was appropriately made parallel to the *marutam* region, and

19 T. 954. 20 T. 1010 ff. 21 *Puram;* 271, 272.

since morning was the hour for setting out to besiege the ramparts, say the commentators, it fittingly corresponded to its *akam* counterpart.

There are two other divisions of *akam* poetry which have no landscape background prescribed in Tolkaappiyar, probably because these were an addition made after the Tamils had codified the five-fold division. These are phases of erotomania outside the course of mutual love, *Peruntiṇai* or lust, and *Kaikkiḷai* or unrequited love. These may occur with any of the aforesaid landscapes as background, but since they do not enter directly into our theme, it is sufficient to have made mention of them. Their *puṛam* counterparts are *kaañci* and *paaṭan* respectively, the former comprising all poems on the transitoriness of the world, and the latter all eulogistic and panegyric verse.

Puram poetry was not limited by natural landscape as was *akam* poetry. *Akam* poetry had to consider as its essential theme one of the five aspects of love-poetry, choose an appropriate situation and write with the prescribed landscape, the annual season and the period of day pertinent to the division. The poet had to be particular about choosing similes and metaphors from objects exclusive to the region. The objects were: the god, food, fauna, flora, music and other objects indigenous to the region. By way of exception, the flora or birds or any of the other objects of one region might be mentioned in a poem of another region, for even Nature is not rigorous in her natural divisions as to be so exclusive. This mixing of regional objects was permitted, and was known as "regional interchange." Only there could be no interchange as regards the gods; they were exclusive to one region.[22]

Historical Origins of Five-Fold Division

It would be worth attempting a historical explanation of this codification of poetry in Tamil. An explanation has been attempted by P. T. Srinivas Iyengar in his *History of the Tamils*.[23] The present writer arrived at nearly the same conclusions independently of the work of that praiseworthy pio-

[22] T. 958, 959, 964. [23] H. T. pp. 63-70.

neer in the field of Tamil history. It was not till I had formulated my explanation that a copy of his book, now rare, came to my hands.

Tamil poetry, from the very earliest period to which imagination based on history may lead us, was realistic. It portrayed the actual customs of the people and the actual state of the landscape. The poets of the various parts of Tamil Naad of those very distant days wrote unhampered by convention, and depicted their regions with a candour and spontaneity natural to bards who come early in the history of a nation. What later became the fashion was then the fact. The poet in the *kuṟiñci* region sang of love, how a young man got allied to a young woman whom he met while out hunting the deer or tracking the elephant, or how he had saved the life of a young girl when she was swept down the river by the current. These were the picturesque and dramatic situations of the life of those early days, and they formed, therefore, the subject of poetry. In the days when hunting was the main occupation of the hills, a proof of his prowess in archery might have been required of a young man before he could win a girl in marriage with the approval of the elders. He might have had to produce the tooth of a tiger in order to prove he was a great hunter, and capable of defending and supporting the woman he wedded. It would be quite natural in such a society to have it given as a token to the wife, or to have it worn by the children as a token of his life-long pledge. That originated the *taali* of the tiger's tooth.[24] The wedding would naturally be celebrated under the favourite trees when they were in bloom with the river sand spread like a carpet under the trees. It would be marked by a feast in which men and women would join together in song and dance. They would be covered with the dresses of the best leaves interspersed with the bright flowers of the locality.[25]

Young maidens of the family of the tribal chiefs would

[24] *Kur;* 161, 3; *Akam;* 7, 18; *Puram;* 374, 9.

[25] *Kali;* 39. See G. Subramania Pillai, "Tree Worship and Ophiolatry in the Tamil Nad", pp. 79-82, in the *Journal of the Annamalai University,* Vol. XII, Nos. 2, 3, 1943. Similar use of leaves and flowers in the Pacific islands is worth study.

spend their days wandering about the hillside gathering flowers for their garlands, and leaves for their dresses; those of the common class would spend the day guarding their crops keeping the parrots away from the millet fields or pounding the millet with the holes in the rocks as mortars.[26]

Family life knew little separation. Nature gave them everything, except salt, and the salt came to them from the seacoasts, and salt is the merchandise which figures prominently as being sent to the hills.

Similarly in other regions there were other primitive modes of life. The people in the desert and waterless regions of the *paalai* were given to predatory habits. Those of the *mullai* had their own conventions regarding love. Here the maiden would be won, not by victory over a tiger, but by victory over a ferocious bull or buffalo or some other animal. The nuptials would take place not under a *veenkai,* but under a *mullai* bower.[27] In *neytal,* the sea-shore and the laurel grove afforded a beautiful setting for the meeting of lovers.[28] A lad would come across a lass keeping the birds away from the fish spread out to be dried, as in *kuriñci* the mountain lad would find her keeping the birds away from the millets.

Thus the poets of each region were truthful in describing what they saw. Even when a poet of one region wrote poetry about another region, he was scrupulously faithful in his portrayal of that region. A poet describing the hill-region or recounting an incident of the hills spoke in language appropriate to the hill-folk. As terms of comparison he chose only objects that were found on the hills.

Apart from this output of love-poetry there were also spontaneous poems about other aspects of life, in the *kuriñci* about cattle-lifting, in the *neytal* about sustained frays that had taken place against invaders, in the *marutam* where a large village by the riverside had been besieged, about the siege. There were then in each region poems praising the chiefs of the respective regions; there were reflective poems on the transitoriness of life; there were poems on statecraft, on kingship, on noble living as and when occasion or reflection demanded.

[26] *Kurincippaattu, passim; Kali.* 40, 41, 42 introductory portions.

[27] *Kali;* 101-104. [28] *Kur;* 123, 199; *Kali;* 135; *Akam;* 320, 340, 370.

A later age which was heir to all this poetry found it necessary to classify the poems according to the subjects. Later poets wished to model their poems on the works of their ancestors, and such a desire if natural in every country, was doubly so in Eastern country where reverence for custom was unqualified, and where tradition was the law. The codifiers of Tamil poetry came in and they found the bulk of poetry divisible into two main divisions as regards themes; love-poetry and all that is not love-poetry, *akam* and *puṛam*. The *akam* poetry contained various aspects of love, and the *puṛam* poetry contained various aspects of warfare and life. They found the geographical factor determinant and conclusive in the poetry. This was the result of the Tamil poets being true to Nature. Hence they classified the poetry according to the region of origin. This was easy at a time when the lives of the poets were still remembered, and their full names included the names of the villages or towns in which they were born or lived or acquired fame. These were the first anthologies of Tamil literature.

I do not believe that *paalai* was included in the first and original classification, because *paalai* as such does not exist in the Tamil country, and when it does occur is only of a temporary duration, long as the summer and no more. Further, the separation which it denotes might occur in any of the four regions, especially during courtship. Some poems which actually portray separation and classified by later editors as *paalai* contain no allusion at all to the flora and fauna of the desert. At a later date, a second classification made the number of regions five, and included under the *paalai* head the large number of poems with separation of lovers as their key-note, and under its *puṛam* opposite, *vaahai*, panegyric poems of every kind, even outside of warfare. That *paalai* was a subsequent addition is made plausible by the fact that its opposite *vaahai*, alone among the first five *puram* regions, includes poems outside of warfare, and by *Tolkaappiyam* ascribing neither a god to *paalai* nor a separate region.

A few centuries after these first anthologies were made, other enterprising redactors and codifiers would have found it necessary to draw up rules not only about the main divi-

sion of *akam* and *puram*, but also about the four regions. As literary output increases there is always room to draw up more and more rules for the benefit of students and aspirants who desire to compose poetry. They found the former codification inadequate in so far as it was too general. It had limited a certain class of poetry to a certain region, but this later codification went a step further and prescribed also the hour or hours of day and the season of the year most suitable for poems of each class.

A further stage in codification was reached when in the course of years it was found that a large number of poems which could not be conveniently classified under the five heads proved a problem to redactors. It was to meet this difficulty, especially in the *puram* division, that two more "landless divisions" were invented in *akam* poetry with suitable opposites in *puram* poetry. These were *peruntiṇai* or passion, and *kaikkilai* or one-sided and unrequited love. These might occur in any of the five regions as would their *puram* opposites, *kaañci* signifying the transient state of wordly things, and *paaṭaantiṇai* comprising all panegyric poetry. When compared with the subject-matter of *vaahai*, it looks as if *paṭaan* was a subsequent addition to include the enormous output of panegyric poetry that arose at a later stage of Tamil civilization when Tamil kings and Tamil chiefs had court poets.

These seven divisions of poetry with their subdivisions which we have explained, were already long existing and had been crystallized in many works of rhetoricians, when Tolkaappiyar wrote his *porulatikaaram*. That a long period must have passed between the first attempts of the Tamil bard and the composition of *Tolkaappiyam* must be evident to every one who examines the historical development of Tamil poetry.

Tolkaappiyar's predecessors themselves had foreseen that these rules regarding flora and fauna and the manifestations of Nature in sun and sky and stars could not be followed too strictly by poets, nor too meticulously by redactors. Hence they provided for exceptions to the rules, and certain breaches of the ordinary poetic conventions were permitted under the head of "regional interchange".

The "essential theme" of one region could not be attributed

to another.[29] Thus under the *kuriñci* class of poems it would not be permissible to compose or include a poem which had "pining" (*neytal*) as its essential topic. But a *kuriñci* landscape might be used for a *mullai* poem. The landscape, or seasons, or flora and fauna of one region could be used by way of exception in the composition of a poem, the essential topic of which was typified by another. Naccinaarkkiniyar in his commentary on the twelfth rule of Tolkaappiyar's *akattinai-iyal* brings together a number of poems which exemplify "regional fusion", terming them as *kuriñci* in *paalai*, *kuriñci* in *neytal*, *kuriñci* in *marutam*, and so forth.[30] Ilampuuranar, in his explanation of another rule, differs entirely from the explanation given by Naccinaarkkiniyar, and quotes as illustration of "regional interchange" lines from the forty-eighth poem of *Akanaanuuru*,[31] in which poem the poet says that the hero appears with a garland of water-lilies around his neck and a chaplet of *ixora* flowers. Water-lilies belong to the agricultural region; the *ixora* to the montane. The poem's "essential theme" is "union" and therefore it belongs to the montane or *kuriñci* class of poetry. The introduction of "water-lilies" according to Ilampuuranar, is an illustration of what is meant by regional interchange.

"Regional interchange" was used in panegyrics to praise the plurality of regions in a certain kingdom. Among the three kingdoms of the Tamil country, the Paantiya country was the one which had the largest extent of all the regions, whereas the Coola was mainly agricultural, and the Ceera was mainly mountainous and maritime. The poets take occasion of the longer poems to describe the fertility or life in the different regions. Thus the *Perumpaanaarruppatai* and the *Maturaikaañci* have extensive descriptions of the regions.[32] The *Porunar-aarruppatai* which is a poem in praise of the Coola kingdom points out that the different regions in the kingdom are in such close proximity that the men, animals and birds of one region have constant relationship with the men, animals and birds of the other regions. The poetical description of the inti-

29 T. 958, 959. 30 E.g. *Aink;* 366; 36, 370, 101, 122, 197, 92, etc.

31 Ilam; *Akattinai-iyal,* No. 15.

32 Of five regions in the Ceera Kingdom, see *Patir;* 30.

mate exchange of social intercourse is developed in the traditional Tamil style. The following is a paraphrase:

> The fisher-folk sing the tunes native to the hill-folk, and the hill-folk wear garlands of neytal blooms, which are native to the coast. The shepherds sing the tunes of the agricultural regions, and the farmers praise the nature of the flower of the pastoral regions. The jungle fowl pecks the grains of the fields, and the domestic fowl pecks at the millet of the hill. The monkey of the hill bathes in the salt-lakes near the sea, and the stork of the salt marsh rests itself on the hill.[33]

[33] *Porunar;* 218-226; *Malaipatu;* 331-334.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE REGIONAL LANDSCAPES

The Mountains

The purpose of this chapter is to portray briefly in broad outline the landscape of the Tamil country as pictured by the Tamil poets in poems of both the *akam* and the *puṟam* class. Any thirty or forty poems of the poetry of each region chosen at random from the anthologies should give one a comprehensive idea of landscape as depicted in Tamil poetry. The landscape of Tamil poetry is both real and synthetic, real in the *puṟam* poems but mostly synthetic in the *akam*. By synthetic, I do not mean the landscape is unreal. The descriptions are true to Nature and true to fact, but the poet may not be describing any single spot of the Tamil country. He may choose his details from various spots provided they are in harmony with the season of the year and of day, and with the particular region which forms the background of his poem. In his choice he would give preference to such details of landscape as heighten or bring into relief the "essential theme" of human behaviour about which he wishes to write.

In Tamil poetry as we have seen, mountains and hills and the territories covered by them occupy a privileged place. They form the background for love poetry whenever it describes the meeting of lovers and all the attendant circumstances intimately connected with such trysts. In *puṟam* poetry, they form the background of the initial stage of warfare, of frontier raids and forays for the purpose of cattle-lifting. The panegyric passages and poems addressed to mountain chiefs contain many references to the hill country over which they rule. The *Malaipaṭukaṭaam* or the "Poem of Mountain Sounds", deserves special mention because it is devoted mainly to descriptions relating to hills covered by dense forests. This poem of 583 lines portrays vividly the sights and sounds of that particular region ruled by the Chief, Nannan. The

"Lyric of *Kuriñci*" by Kapilar consisting of 261 lines illustrates many of the requisites of *kuriñci* poetry. Many and diverse are the circumstances which determine the classification of a poem under the *kuriñci* class. "Union and its allied states" is a very general head which includes several mental states and types of conversation among all those involved in a love theme. Tolkaappiyar presents the codified poetic system of his time and mentions the several ways in which lovers meet and talk, and the parts played by the lovers themselves, by the parents, the brothers, the nurse, and the nurse's daughter who plays the role of constant companion and confidant of the lady. He draws up briefly the matter and mode of dialogues or conversations and even the feelings that should be uppermost in the hearts and minds of the characters of the poems as well as the emotions which the reader or hearer might expect to interpret from the poems.[1]

A *kuriñci* poem, sonnet-like and consisting of twelve or fifteen lines, might be the supposed announcement of a lady to her maid as to how she has come across one to whom she has given her heart, or it might be the supposed upbraiding of the lover by the maid for his having broken the heart of her lady by his apparent negligence and reluctance to celebrate the ceremonial and public act of marriage. It may be the clever announcement of the maid to the nurse that her lady is in love and that she will marry no other than the one upon whom she has set her heart. It may be the mere poetic expression of the pleasures of the reunion of lovers or it may be soliloquies of the lovers. The poet may imagine himself to be the lady or the maid or the lover or the nurse or the parents. He is expected to put himself in the place of anyone of these actors in the drama of love, and his art is evaluated by his insight into the psychology especially of the female heart, its tantrums, its vagaries, its depth of feelings and its restlessness in separation.

The Tamil poets had as lovely a hill region as any to portray as the stage for the poems of this kind. The visitor to popular hill resorts such as Kodaikanal or Ootacamund, or Coonoor can have but a faint notion of what the Tamil poets

[1] See T. *e.g.* 982-988; 1057, 1060, 1061, 1092-1099.

described. To see montane Nature as they saw it, it would be necessary to go into the obscure and less frequented parts of the Palani hills, of the Nilgris, and of the Western Ghats of South Malabar and Travancore. It would be necessary to walk across the mule paths in primaeval forests, to rest in natural caves formed on mountain sides where the tiger or the bear has but recently left its footprints, to startle the deer grazing among the tall grass, to listen to the infant brook trickling over the stones, to watch the elephant bend the bamboo for its mate, to hear the bear at night digging deep into the ant-hills so that the glow-worms scatter about in consternation "as sparks from the smithy's anvil."[2] It would be necessary to climb thousands of feet above the plains, to receive the hospitality of folk who depend on hunting for much of their food, and to warm oneself by the fire meant to keep off the wild animals and the cold.

The life in *kuriñci* as depicted in the poems is a life intimate with Nature. To the chief, the hero of the conventional love poem, belong the mountain heights. They are lofty and so too is his character and his nobility. Under his rule are the dwellers of the hills. Their chief occupation is hunting. They startle their prey by pelting stones among the grasses and thickets, and by loud whistles. Near their hamlets are thick dense tropical forests where wild beasts roam, especially the elephant that wanders at night destroying the crops which they have laboured to raise. The bear and panther prowl stealthily to prey among the cattle.

Men keep awake at night in ambushes on the tops of trees to scare away the wild animals from the crops. They keep a fire burning, and in poetry, in order to show the wealth of the region, the fire is said to be made of logs of sandalwood, the most fragrant timber of the locality. Should they hear the stir of wild beasts they aim stones from their slings in the direction of the sound. The lover that comes surreptitiously at night to keep his tryst runs the risk of being mistaken for a wild animal and consequently of being attacked by the watchmen.[3]

[2] *Akam;* 72, 4-5. [3] *Kur;* 357; 59.

The mountaineers trade in ivory, and barter it for salt from the littorals. For their cereals, they grow especially *panicum* irrigating their sparse plots of arable land with the water from the mountain streams. Their food consists of also the other produce of the hills, namely, the tubers of the *vaḷḷi*, and the honey that is so plentiful on the branches of the trees and the beetling rocks.

The young women keep watch over the crops during the day. The heroine of the love poems too is equally matched with the hero in nobility of birth and loftiness of ideals. She occupies herself during the day with her maid and other playmates of her age by driving the birds, especially the parrots, that may cause destruction to the crops. They dare not hurt them but make a frightening noise with the *taṭṭai*, a device made of the palmyrah stalk which when separated into two and beaten together makes a loud dull thud like that which is produced when beating two flat wooden planks together. They raise their own voices too, or make musical sounds that the parrots may not settle down on the turf.[4] In these parts, during certain seasons, parrots swarm in hundreds and fill the region with their shrill cries. The damsels play on the swings arranged for them, or bathe in the streams or wander about the neighbourhood gathering flowers from the lakes and the trees and adorning themselves. To scare away wild animals, a tiger-like form was kept in the cultivated plots.[5]

The domain of the chief is fenced with heaven-kissing hills. They are so lofty that they baffle even the monkey which is so agile and knows no limitations to its capacity for climbing. The dark rain clouds rest on the hills. The rivers, glistening like snakes, or white as linen, rush down the mountain-side, or leap from rock to rock, and the cataracts roar like war drums. At times of torrential rain the mountain-rivers carry with them to the low-lands the trees, plants and flowers of the hillside.

On the mountain sides there are dense and almost impenetrable forests where the air is as cooling as the waters in a tank and where even the sunlight hardly enters. Among the

[4] *Kur*; 29. A device known as *Kulir* is also mentioned to drive birds away. *Akam*; 118. [5] *Aink*; 246; *Nar*; 206, 251.

lofty trees of the landscape, the *veenkai* is prominent because of its bright flowers which seem like flames of fire. The flowers resemble so much the colour of the tiger that the elephant sometimes attacks the *veenkai* trees in bloom mistaking them for its hereditary enemy.[6]

Another tree very much mentioned in connection with the hills is the bamboo. Its tender shoots are relished by the elephants and its "rice" by the hill-folk. The male elephant bends the tall bamboo for its mate to feed on the shoots and then the bamboo swings back to its original position like "the rod of the fisherman" who feels a tug at his line.[7] Kapilar, who with Paranar, is the poet *par excellence* of the *kuriñci* region has depicted many a scene about the hills with singular accuracy of observation joined to remarkable skill in delicate phrasing and sensuous beauty of words which a European critic might associate with Vergil or with Tennyson.[8] Having in mind the dance that a juggler's wife performs on a bamboo to the accompaniment of the drum and the clarinet played by her husband and children, Kapilar describes the dance of a peacock in the hills:

> *With the flute of the westerly wind that blows across the perforated stops swaying bamboos;*
> *With the sweet sound of the waters cool of the rivers as congregate drums resounding;*
> *With the call of deep sounding flock of gazelles as clarinet and the bees of the mountain flowers as lute, and*
> *Chattering monkeys as an astonished auditorium, the peacocks dancing on the bamboo hillside resemble the maids dancing in the dancing hall.*
>
> (*Akam;* 82)

6 This picture of montane nature is drawn from various poems of the *kurinci* class.

7 *Kur;* 54, 4.

8 K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *Chronology* o.c.; p. 59:

"Probably only a quantitative judgment of poetical merit has allowed Kapilar to successfully contest with Paranar for the premier place amongst the company of the Cangam poets. . . . Though Kapilar himself was a poet of high gifts the conviction cannot be resisted that Paranar outdistances him in the supreme quality of poetic inspiration and many-sided grasp of life."

Nature thus provides the accompaniment to the dance of the peacocks.

The poets were sensitive in their perception of smells and sounds. The hillside is said to be fragrant with the odour of sandalwood or the *kaantal,* or as fragrant as a house where the wedding feast is celebrated. The ripe fruits of the jack-tree too are smelt far and wide on the hilly ranges. Among the sounds which fill the hillsides are the trumpeting of elephants at fight with the tiger or of elephants bathing in the swift waters of the river; the shrill cry of monkeys whose young ones have perished because they did not clutch more firmly to their mothers; the shouts of children gathering *veen-kai* flowers, or the singing of the women of the hills pounding *panicum* or soothing with song their men who have been wounded by the tigers.[9]

Evening descends with a slow and sad note and the night comes when the hero under its cover stealthily hastens to meet his beloved. The mule path along the hill lies "like a rope on the back of an elephant". It is so steep that it seems like a road of the plain that has been set up almost perpendicularly. Lightning which flashes as if "tearing the veil of night" sometimes lends merciful light. But the hero believes that the thought of his heroine's radiant beauty is sufficient to light him along the steep path.[10]

It may be that he comes in a downpour of rain or in the shivering cold. He must reckon with so many odds, especially with the wild animals and the mountain serpents. He may himself be taken for a wild elephant or for a god or spirit by those who keep awake, guardians of the crops.

The *Neṭunalvaaṭai,* the "Long Dreary Winter", is a poem of 317 lines, and portrays both the cold season and midnight, the "seasons" prescribed for the poetry of this kind. P. Sundaram Pillai says of this poem "I would request the reader to study it in the original, and to say whether the author does not deserve to be placed among the very best of the poets of any

[9] For a chained listing of mountain sounds, see *Malaipatukataam,* 291 ff.

[10] *Nar;* 192.

country."[11] I can attempt only a summary of the part relating to the effects of the cold north wind.

> It is the end of November, and the heavy clouds, having exhausted their first fury, now take to training themselves in the gentler art of drizzling. The shepherds change over to new pastures, and gather in groups and warm themselves at the fire which they have kindled by rubbing together two pieces of wood. It is so bitter cold and shivering that the cattle are reluctant to graze; the monkeys chatter with cold; birds fall weary in the course of their flight; the cows kick at their calves that approach them; the storks and cranes flock to the shoals where the fishes congregate; the rice stalks bend under the weight of the grain; and raindrops hang on branch and leaf and flower in the groves and parks.

Having described Nature's stage, the poet proceeds to describe the wintry evening in the town, and finally leads his reader to the queen's bedroom in the palace, where listless and forlorn she lies thinking of her lord.

But her lord is far away in the battle-field. It is midnight; however he knows no rest. With his left hand he holds closely his cloak and with his right hand on the shoulder of his aide-de-camp, he goes from soldier to soldier inquiring after the wounded, while the stallions in the temporary stables restlessly stir themselves to get rid of the raindrops. The latter picture brings to mind the scene described by Shakespeare in *King Henry V*:

> O, now, who will behold the royal captain of this ruin'd band walking from watch to watch, from tent to tent, let him cry, 'Praise and glory on his head!' For forth he goes and visits all his host; bids them good-morrow with a modest smile, and calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen. Upon his royal face there is no note how dread an army hath enrounded him; nor doth he dedicate one jot of colour unto the weary and all-watched night; but freshly looks, and over-bears attaint with cheerful semblance and sweet majesty; that every wretch, pining and pale before, beholding him, plucks comfort from his looks: A largess universal, like the sun, his liberal eye doth give to every one, thawing cold fear.[12]

The poem is an excellent example of how the panorama of Nature is made the stage of human action. In the poems of the

11 *The Tamilian Antiquary*, No. 5, p. 71; see K. GOTHANDAPANI PILLAI, *Netunalvaatai* (Tm) Madras, 1946. 12 Act IV, Prologue, 28-45.

kuriñci class, Nature is described as if in sympathy with the heroine, for the sufferings and bleak aspect presented in Nature reflect the bleak and forlorn condition of the heroine who desires the hero's return. In other poems, Nature is presented as placing obstacles on the way of the lover's reunion, but the effect is produced by contrast, for the joy of the meeting of the lovers is great in proportion to the number of difficulties they overcome. Paranar mentions in an *akam* poem how the feasting in the village, the sleeplessness of the nurse or the mother, the watchmen, the barking of the dog, the moonlight bright as day, the hoot of the owl, the crowing of the cock may all in their turn hinder or delay the nocturnal tryst of lovers.[13]

The Pasture-lands

The landscape changes entirely when one descends from the mountain ranges of Tamil Naad to its *mullai* or pastoral regions. The terrain is more or less a sloping plain broken here and there by hillocks. The vegetation is sparse, consisting mostly of thorny bushes, and the ground is stony. Occasional clumps and groves of big trees break the monotony. The chief feature, however, is the jasmine creeper which revives with wonderful rapidity after the first showers of the seasonal rain. Tamil poetry contemplates these pastoral districts as they appear in the cloud season when the dark rain-clouds gather, or after the first showers of rain when bird and beast are supremely content at the freshness of new life that the rains have brought. The vermilion coloured velvety insects creep across the landscape; the temporary river hurries towards no destination in particular; the gazelles wander about the landscape; the wild-fowl draws patterns on the earth with its feet.

The shepherds keep to the meadows nearer to their villages, and return to the folds in the evenings. The sun has set; the jasmines unfold their buds and fill the air with their fragrance; the tintinnabulation of the bells tied around the necks of the cows and calves is heard as they return to the fold, and the wail of the flutes of cowherds and shepherds

[13] *Akam;* 122.

rends the still solemness of the countryside. The heroine waits anxiously for the return of her lord, for he had promised to return ere the setting in of the seasonal rains.

She seeks comfort in every little sign of the coming season such as in the cry of the peacock, the flowering of the *mullai* creeper, and the lowering skies and the clouds emptying themselves of their fresh showers. The delay in the hero's return causes her the utmost pain. Her anxious waiting, her consoling herself, or her being consoled by her companions, her brave bearing-up of the sorrows of separation, these form the topics when the lady is the chief subject of the *mullai* class of poems. If she is not virtuous in her patient waiting, she would be far from being lady-like and of noble birth.[14]

As for the hero, it would be unmanly for him to return to his heroine without having fulfilled the mission on which he went, even if that costs him the pangs of separation and additional suffering at the thought of what his lady-love might be undergoing because he has not returned. He accomplishes his task, and once his task is accomplished, he hastens with all the haste at his command to her who will be waiting with eyes bedewed with tears. Often the hero's sentiments are expressed in the form of exhortations to his charioteer to urge on the horses and drive speedily that he might reach the embraces of his beloved before nightfall. In one of the smaller poems, a chief desires to hasten to his beloved before the time he has announced for his return. But the rains set in. Hence he compares his haste to that of a farmer who possesses but one ox. Before the land dries, he must take time by the forelock and plough his entire field, while the man with many pairs of oxen may plough his fields at leisure.[15]

The season that should form the background of this class of poems is the season of the annual rains. The first rains in the Tamil country are heralded by lowering skies, by terrific claps of thunder and sheet lightning. The first shower is often not a drizzle but a torrential downpour that within an hour or two changes the entire aspect of Nature, which through the

[14] *Nar;* 266; Cf, *Akam;* 144, 224, 284; *Nar;* 248, 266.

[15] *Kur;* 121; Cf. *ibid.*, 131, 237, 323.

torrid months has looked up to the skies in vain. The thunder is such that it resounds like tremendous drums. Serpents, on hearing it turn cold with fear; it seems to sever their heads from their sinuous coils.[16]

The heroine's companion, to give solace to her mistress can but point to the clouds and the flowers that the first rains have caused to bloom, to remind her that the season has set in and that, therefore, the chief will soon return.[17] But, if even in spite of these rains he has not returned, she adds in comforting strain, it is not that he has failed to keep his word, but Nature has not followed its usual course, or it is the previous year's surplus waters of which the clouds are unburdening themselves before they prepare to store up the waters for the oncoming season! Even the trees and creepers that flower have allowed themselves to be deceived.

> How have the *konrai* trees of heavy stems been foolish. Though the season announced by him who has crossed the rugged arid waste has not yet come, they have covered their branches with dense flowers, believing that these rains out of time are the showers of the season to come.[18]

The rain brings untold blessings. All Nature is happy and content, and the trees of the pastoral regions begin to flower. The flower that is most mentioned is the flower that is the emblem of this region, the white candid *mullai* of incomparable fragrance, the symbol of chastity. It is easy to understand how the flower of this region became the symbol of conjugal fidelity on the part of woman. The choice could not have fallen on a prettier flower.

Towards dusk, the conventional hour of the day to be taken into account in these poems, the *mullai* creepers fill the vicinity with the fragrance of their flowers. Since they denote conjugal fidelity, the heroines prefer the *mullai* buds and flowers for their wreaths and garlands. The people of this region prefer to play and dance in the glades where it abounds, and the

[16] *Kur;* 190, 200; *Akam;* 92, 202. [17] *Kur;* 358.

[18] *Kur;* 66; C. 21, 251, 382. See *Lectures on Kuruntokai* (Tm) Tirunelveli, 1940; pp. 56-101.

shepherds out on the watch with their flocks deck themselves with the white flowers.[19]

Another tree that hangs out its golden garlands is the *konrai*. When it is in bloom, the entire tree presents an aspect of long bunches of golden garlands of flowers hanging from the branches. The leaves, in fact, are hardly noticeable when the tree is in bloom. The flowers are said to resemble jewellery worn by women and children. Small pits near the *konrai* trees where the wind gathers these golden flowers are said to resemble the caskets in which wealthy men heap up their gold.[20]

Other flowering trees that belong to the region also obtain frequent mention are the *pittikam*, the *piirkku*, the *kaayaa*, the *pitavam* and the *avarai*.

In Tamil poetry, the evening is said to bring affliction to separated lovers. The heroine believes that the hero will return to her because there is also an evening in the land of his sojourn to remind him of the sorrows which accompany the separation of lovers. She uses several epithets regarding the evening to show how much she dreads the approach of that ambivalent hour.[21] Every aspect of nature at this hour of day, every sight, sound, smell and touch seems to accentuate her loneliness. The rain cloud drifting leisurely or resting on mountain tops or pouring its contents on the earth, reminds her that her lover has not returned as he promised. The farmers that went to the fields in the early morning with their little baskets filled with the seeds to be sown, now return home the same baskets filled with the season's flowers, a poignant reminder that the season has advanced without bringing any relief to her. The farmer's little daughter who has gathered the flowers of the countryside, goes hawking them along the roads, and her cries fill the heroine with as much concern as also the sight of the shepherds who repair to the village with milk, their heads and ears bedecked with flowers. Since the night is often wet during this season, the shepherds prefer to leave the plains and meadows and repair to the town or village with their flocks. The wailing of the flutes hurts her

19 *Kali;* 113, 23 ff; *Akam;* 164, 174, 184, 364. 20 *Kur;* 21, 148, 223.

21 M. Varadharajan, *The Treatment of Nature in Sangam Literature*, o.c., p. 366.

intensely. The cuckoo is not forlorn and yet its cries are heart-rending. How much more heart-rending ought to be the cries of her lone self? Even the touch of the cool water of the streams hurts her, for their coolness reminds her of the happiness of life together.

> These have been like spears that dig up an open sore in the heart. The cuckoo that calls without knowing the pangs of separation does hurt. The stream that swells with waters fresh does hurt more. But the farmer's tender maiden has her basket full of the cool petals of the *kurukkatti* and *pittikai*. The bees hum around her basket. She cries 'Won't you buy my flowers?' She does hurt indeed.[22]

The fragrant odours of the jasmine, and the *gloriosa superba* in splendid array, its red petals shining like lamps lit at sunset, and the friendly chatter of the pigeons in the courtyard, hurt yet more an already wounded heart. It is evening when every living being, and even inanimate Nature, seems to seek repose.

The *mullai* buds are compared to teeth in Cankam literature. In the dusk, the white buds stand clear in their candid radiance. They are supposed to gibe at the lovers, mocking at the hero that he has not kept his word, at the heroine that she has not merited the hero's return, at both for the loneliness which is theirs. They bring tears to the eyes of the heroine.[23]

Nor has the hero in his distant abode been unaware of the suffering that is the heroine's lot. He strives to complete his mission, for it would be unheroic to leave it incomplete, whatever be the suffering caused to himself and to his beloved. Once it is over, he urges the charioteer to hasten home where the heroine will be waiting, anxious to detect the faintest sound of the chariot bells. The chariot passes over the jungle sands that have lately been washed by the rains. He sees the silken vermilion coloured insects that the fresh rains bring. He sees the antelopes "with horns twisted in cast iron" with their mates refreshed by the waters that the rains have provided. He will not let the noise of his chariot disturb them.

[22] *Nar;* 97, Cf. *ibid.*, 321, 364; *Kur;* 21, 344.
[23] *Kur;* 126, 162; 186; cat's smile, *ibid.*, 210, 240.

While bird and beast are happy, these but stimulate him to redouble his efforts to reach home at the earliest opportunity. On his journey's way he sees the flowers fall away from the trees. It reminds him of the possibility, this is one of the characteristic exaggerations to be met in Cankam poetry, of the bangles that should be dropping away from the arms of his beloved because of the slimness to which she has been reduced as a result of his absence.[24] His coming is awaited. His lady has watchers who report to her that the chariot is on its way. She yet hesitates to give the report full credence, but she is assured that they have seen it from the "*muLLai* covered mound."[25]

The poem of Napuutanaar in the *Pattuppaaṭṭu* collection is the longest *mullai* poem we have. It consists of 103 lines, and contains within itself a compendium of ideas and similes appropriate to a *mullai* poem, and to its opposite division in *puṟam* poetry, *vañci*. The heroine lives in a country villa surrounded by the flora and fauna appropriate to the region, while her lord, the Paaṇṭiyan King Neṭuñceliyan, the hero of Talaiyaalangaanam, is in his encampment in the field of battle. The heroine's queenly bearing of her sorrow, the suppressed tears, the comfort and solace that her ladies-in-waiting endeavour to give her, and in the closing lines the green and flowery mantle with which the rainy season has covered the earth, are described with the masterly strokes of both a portrait and landscape painter.[26]

Exhaustive pen-pictures of the shepherd's life like those found in Theocritus or Vergil are few, but the few passages which Cankam poetry contains are striking, and show an appreciation of the shepherd's life and his contribution to society. A poem in the *Naṟṟiṇai* collection (142) contains a vivid reference to the shepherd in the rain. He has a leathern case hung across his shoulders. It contains his apparatus for obtaining fire. A mat across his body protects him partially from the rain. On a short staff meant to urge the sheep, he rests one leg and as he sees his sheep likely to wander away from

24 *Kur;* 282. 25 *Kur;* 275, Cfr. *Akam;* 54.

26 SWAMI VEDACHALAM, *A Critical Tamil Commentary on Mullaippaattu* (Tm), Pallavaram, 1931.

the fold, he purses his lips in a loud whistle.[27] At night he wears his dew-dripping garlands, and with a firebrand and his whistle keeps the jackals away.[28]

The Lay of the Larger Lutanist (*Perumpaaṇaaṟṟuppaṭai*) which contains long descriptions of the five regions presents a minute picture of the daily life in the shepherd home. The shepherdess wakes early with the birds and works with the churning rod "that doth resound like a tiger's roar". With the butter-milk and ghee she supports her kith and kin. Beyond her village are the fields of the *mullai* tracts, where, not rice is grown as in the *marutam* regions, but mostly cereals like *varaku*. These fields belong to farmers, but farmers of the pastoral lands.

Within the description of shepherd life occur interesting observations regarding their close life with Nature. The shepherd wears garlands but since he lives out in the jungle, he has a choice out of a variety of flowers. The wreath which he wears on his head is said to be "of various flowers from branch and from creeper."[29] He has his flute the stops of which he himself has made by branding the reed with the fire that he kindled from his fire-sticks.[30] The shepherd's flute and his music in the pastoral regions is not a mere poetic convention as in much of modern poetry, but was a reality, even far more than it was in Italy at the time when Vergil wrote his eclogues.

The *kali* odes present special features of pastoral life in the Tamil country. They describe the kind of bull-fighting and bull-baiting that was common, and is yet to be found in modified forms, in some districts like Chetty Naad. The shepherds showed their prowess by mastering the strongest bulls that would be driven helter-skelter from sheds where they were congregated. This was a favourite pastime, and young shepherdesses would marry or be given in marriage to those who mastered the bull pointed out to them for conquest. The maidens would watch with eagerness and anxiety for the young men of their choice to subdue them.[31]

[27] Cfr. *Kur;* 221; *Cirupaan;* 164 ff; *Perumpaan.* 166, *Akam;* 276, 8-9.
[28] *Akam;* 94. [29] *Perumpaan;* 174-175. [30] *Ibid.*, 177 ff.
[31] *Lectures on Kalittokai* (Tm), Tirunelveli, 1943, pp. 20-22.

In the odes describing bull-baiting, and in the other odes written in the form of dialogues between heroines and their companions, or between suitors and the maidens to whom they made their advances, occur significant similes and descriptions of Nature. The pastoral people were divided, to be exact, into buffalo-herds, cowherds, and shepherds according as they reared buffaloes or cows or sheep. Garlands of the regional flowers are indispensable ornaments even at the time of bull-fighting. The victors and their maids dance to the tune of the flute in the sand-strewn groves and the sandy beds of rivers round which *mullai* abounds, and render thanks to Tirumaal, the god of their region, and pray for the welfare of their king.[32]

Though some of the *kali* odes are erotic, there are many in which grace and delicacy of expression prevail. A young maid wishes to express her preference for a certain cowherd. She does so indirectly to her companion that she might inform her parents and thus avert her being married to someone else: "You know the angry bull that by its horn took the *mullai* garland off the head of a cowherd. Because of its incessant tossing, the flowers mostly fell on my head. Suppose my mother heard of how I re-made the garland, and that it originally belonged to another, what would she say?" The meaning that she wishes to convey is she has virtually accepted a garland from a cowherd, and it would be contrary to decency to be married to any other man.[33]

The following account by a shepherdess is not without a note of humour. She had received a garland from her clandestine lover which she wore as a chaplet around her hair. While helping in the household work, the flowers fell off her hair in the presence of her parents and thus betrayed her hidden courtship. She compares herself to the drunkard whose reeling walk openly reveals the drinks he has had in private. The incident was not commented upon by the parents. How-

[32] *Kali*; 103, 75 ff. See J. Hutton, *Caste in India*, 3rd ed. Madras, 1961, p. 152, for connections of this sport with Crete and Provence; and E. Thurston, "Maravar" *Castes and Tribes*.

[33] *Kali*; 107.

ever, it all ended happily since they decided to give her in marriage to the one from whom she had received the garland.[34]

Though in the *kali* odes the pastoral region is merely described as the venue of a happy and carefree life, the poems of the *mullai* class in the other anthologies depict Nature as a happy and content background in contrast with the loneliness and suppressed grief of the heroine, and with the anxiety of the hero to return home.

The Littorals

The landscape, or better the seascape, is eminently suited as the poetic background for sorrow and pining and emotional situations related to pining. Everything on the seaboard seems to denote, especially at sunset, an awe and solemnity attending human sorrow. The sun sets in a pool of blood like a sovereign who goes to his reward; the dirge of the ocean resounds along the shore; the waves "white-haired like the aged" bring the fishes and shrimps to the shore and return with the garlands and flowers that they find fallen there.[35]

The lights of the fishing boats far out at sea at night may be seen by those on shore, and the fishermen too out at sea may count such lights of city and town as they keep on burning late into the night. The lights are as bright as the morning sun rising over the brim of the ocean. On moonlit nights, the nets lie on the shore like "pieces of darkness", and the white sands and the sea-side groves seem like the meeting of light and darkness.[36]

The fisher-maid during day keeps watch in lonely places where the fish has been laid out for drying. She scares away the birds which come to feed on the fish. It is then that her lover goes to meet her. The fishing village consists of small huts. There is a smell of fish in the air. Nearby are rich groves of the *Alexandrine laurel.* It sheds its golden pollen below the trees. The *taalai* palm too grows in abundance. In the fierce wind it tosses its leaves, so that they seem like ghosts.[37]

[34] *Kali;* 115.

[35] *Akam;* 123, 12-13. See *Tinnevelly Gazetteer,* p. 17, Madras, 1917.

[36] *Kur;* 81. [37] *Lectures on Narrinai* (Tm), *Neytal,* p. 72 ff.

The fisher-folk lead a noisy and cheerful life. The return of the fishing boats is awaited by young and old, and there is a liberal distribution of the "silver booty" brought from the seas. The children delight in bathing in the seas and gathering the flowers in the inland creeks and backwater.

The *neytal* poems mostly deal with Nature at sunset. The poets bring into the scene with amazing skill the crabs on the lonely shore, the sea-gulls which circle about for prey, the crane that sits on the mounds of salt.

Poets all over the world have chosen sunset, especially sunset to the accompaniment of the dirge of the ocean, as a natural setting for poems sad in tone, expressing grief, longing and lament. The idea that the sun is a sovereign that dies at sunset in a pool of blood prevails through many of these Tamil poems. Francis Thompson in the *Hound of Heaven* says:

I was heavy with the even
When she lit her glimmering tapers
Round the day's dead sanctities,

and Tennyson did not want for him more than "sunset and evening star, and one clear call".

The same idea of sorrow and grief pervades in the *neytal* poems in which "pining and its allied states" is the predominant note. The sunset is described sometimes in such a manner as to harmonize with the heavy and plaintive distress of the heroine, distress amounting to despair.

In the first *neytal Kali* ode is an apostrophe to dusk which the heroine says has come in between the sun and the moon like a regent during an interregnum. The sun after having defeated darkness and reigning like a most glorious sovereign has now sunk behind the mountain ranges like one going to the better world to enjoy the fruits of good deeds. To the world sorrowing over the death of its former sovereign, the moon, an enemy king makes pretence at a beneficent rule by also dispelling the darkness. Like the painful period between the death of the former king and the coming of the new king, has dusk come in. After this introduction, the heroine complains in an address to dusk that it is partial and brings more hap-

piness to those who are happy with their lovers, but affliction to the lonely who are already afflicted.[38]

Among the *neytal* poems, the *kali* odes make plentiful references to Nature. Here is the translation of one of the *kali* odes, which describes the events of Nature at sunset.

The sun having swallowed up its own rays which illuminated the wide world has reached the mountain,
Darkness spreads in colour of him of the unconquerable "Chakra" weapon,
The pretty moon dispels it with her own light.
Water-flowers on stalks fold themselves like eyes that close in slumber
The trees incline their heads in sleep like men who have heard their own praises,
The creepers open their buds like them that wish to smile.
The bees make music like the small bamboo flute,
The birds fly to their fledgelings,
The kine with thoughts of their calves hasten to the fold,
The beasts seek their lairs, the vesper priests greet the evening.
The maids commence lighting the rosy-flamed lamps.

Having described the evening, the heroine adds that an hour which commences taking the life out of women separated from their lovers can hardly be called evening. It really is morning for them.[39]

The apostrophes to dusk, to the moon, to the ocean, to the winds upbraiding them for their cruelty in making poignant at this hour, or for their want of sympathy with the heroine in her sufferings, are many in the *neytal* poems. Often the literary effect is heightened by bringing about a contrast between the happiness of Nature, of bird and beast, and the lonely unhappiness to which the heroine has been condemned.

Since sunset is an hour when the memories crowd in and the heroine's sadness is intensified, all her plaintive ire is against the hour that has come once more to torture her:

38 *Kali;* 118; Cfr. FRANCIS THOMPSON, *Ode to the Setting Sun:*
"Thou dost thy dying so triumphally . . .
Lo! this loud, lackeying praise
Will stay behind to greet the *usurping moon*".

39 *Kali;* 119; 38. Cf. *Macbeth:* light thickens, and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood; good things of day begin to droop and drowse.

Dusk! thou art cruel indeed: Like a cruel hand that aims the arrow at a stag which struggles for life in a flood, hast thou come to torture me at a time when I am sore distressed and am without him to whom I have given my heart.

Dusk, at a time when my pitiless lover hast abandoned me, art those come like those that sneer and laugh at them who have sustained defeat in battle, to sneer and torture me?[40]

The Riverine Plains

The agricultural plains formed a separate region in Tamil poetry, as they actually do in Nature. Those who have seen the vast wide sea of fields around Tanjore, or still further north around Maayaavaram, the fields irrigated by the *Kaaveeri* and the *anicuts* that distribute its waters, will note how widely the landscape differs from the Nilgris and the more southern districts. Its extensive fields broken by occasional copses of the *iluppai,* or the bamboo, its many canals, its tanks, small and large, where the aquatic plants bloom in profusion, its greenery with no background of blue hills as in the other districts, its buffaloes wading or wallowing in placid contentment through patches of water, the white storks and cranes which search for the fresh water fishes and insects, are all today as they must have been two thousand years ago, except for the narrow strip of a negligible railway line which runs through the fields like an intruder.

This region was known as the "region of sweet water" presumably in opposition to the ocean, the region of salt water.[41] What characterizes this region is actually the abundance of water, or at least the abundance of canals and tanks, and even ditches and ponds which when the rains do not fail present a very refreshing panorama. The poets invariably use adjectives expressive of the abundance of water and shade when describing the *marutam* region.

The region is marked by its rice-fields and sugar-cane plots. The rice-fields, before the harvest, seem like an ocean of green, and the sugar-cane fields like dense woods, so far-spread are they. A poet compares the beauty of the heroine to the "great beauty of the fields of abundant sheaves."[42] A king bent on

[40] *Kali;* 120. 10-15. [41] T. 951, 3. [42] *Akam;* 326, 7.

destroying an enemy country would burn all these fields and sow thistles and briars, the Tamil substitute for the Roman use of salt in the fields of Carthage after the battle of Zama.

The harvest over, the sheaves or the hay were stacked so high as to resemble hillocks. The sugar-cane reed is frequently compared as was natural among a warring people to spears and lances. Its flowers are said to toss in the wind like the horse's mane.

The court poetry of *Pattuppaaṭṭu* has references to the *Marutam* tracts, and the *Puṛanaanuuṛu* contains many statements on agriculture and the farmer as forming the backbone and main-stay of a State. In describing a peaceful reign, a poet addresses a sovereign saying that his subjects know of no bow other than the rainbow and no weapon other than the ploughshare.[43]

The aspect of love special to the *marutam* region is "lover's quarrels", or to be more exact, the wife's irritability and sulkiness. These quarrels which are said to be the renewal of love are due, according to the poets, because of the husband's incurring the displeasure of his wife, for faults real or imagined, committed against marital fidelity. Most of the Tamil cities were located in the riverine plains, and there seems to have been at the time a surplus population of women.[44] Courtezans were a perennial danger to marital harmony, and the poems of the marutam region depict the heroine's doubts and suspicions, the hero's repentance, his seeking reconciliation with his wife through the mediation of his companion or the wife's maid, the wife pining in her sorrow, her forgiveness and patience, and reconciliation effected through the common love of their children. The laxity prevailing elsewhere may illustrate a feature of the urbanized culture in the Tamil country.

> Among the wealthier inhabitants of the larger cities 'fast sets' were formed which no doubt merited the strictures of contemporary moralists and satirists, and the chief centres of traffic contained the usual under-world population. A particularly insidious danger grew up out of the institution of slavery, which offered innumerable opportunities to those lacking in self-control, and served to perpetuate laxities in the moral code. A considerable number of female slaves in the Greek

[43] *Puram;* 20, 10-11. [44] *Lectures on Kalittokai* (Tm), p. 78.

and Roman world were prostitutes, and no stigma was attached to celibates or widowers who kept a concubine. In the last days of the Roman Republic and under the early emperors freedom of divorce was grossly abused both by men and women in high society. The worst offenders were men of political ambitions, who made and unmade marriages with a single eye to their political career, Caesar, who had four wives, and Sulla, who had five, were regarded as somewhat unconventional; but Pompey who also married five times, was considered a model of respectability.[45]

Tolkaappiyam did not prescribe any annual season for these poems, possibly because marital infidelity does not limit itself to seasons. The agricultural region was chosen for this aspect of conjugal life for this reason that the bigger towns and cities were located there, and the occasions for marital infidelity were greater in town and cities than in montane or pastoral villages. Further, the landlord farmer would have several women employed under him, and this might have proved an occasion of lax morals as slavery proved to be an occasion in the Graeco-Roman world. This consideration too may have made the codifiers of poetic convention locate this phase of married life in the *marutam* region.

The *marutam* poetry contains elaborate indications of the extent to which courtezans entered into the life of towns, and the extent to which they were aided by intermediaries who acted as the messengers between the chiefs and the women.

The part of day prescribed for these poems, is the dawn and sunrise. By the two words are meant two separate periods of day, the hour or hours immediately preceding the sunrise when birds and beasts begin to stir and the flowers begin to open, and the hour when the sun actually appears and the earth is clearly lit. According to Naccinaarkiniyar the darkness before the dawn is the time when an unfaithful husband returns to his own home before the people are abroad on the streets. Further, the heroine wounded by his conduct and having passed the entire night in suffering, is in an irritable mood and therefore ready for quarrel. The codifiers are said to have added the first hours of daylight because the dawn

[45] CARY and HAARHOFF, *Life and Thought in the Greek and Roman World*, p. 144, London, 1942.

enables the heroine to see even the marks of his misconduct such as his withered garlands, and the sandal paste originating from a second person.[46]

Nature as it is found in the early hours of the morning in the riverine plains is often depicted in the *marutam* poems. The lotuses and water-lilies, the chirp of the birds, the storks and water-fowls, the fresh-water fishes enter largely into the *marutam's* world of imagery. The buffalo, irresponsible and unfeeling brute as it looks, and the bee that goes from flower to flower forsaking once it has drunk of its honey, are alluded to as figures of the hero in his search for unlawful pleasures. It is in these poems that the allegory abounds, for the subject is one that requires delicate handling. The heroine and her maid do not express their anger and regret in plain language, and therefore, the allegory "serves as the medium for concealed and apparently refined expression of their grievance at the chief's misconduct."[47]

The *Ainkuṛunuuṛu*, for instance, in the first hundred poems, treats of love in its *marutam* aspect. Nearly each poem has a concealed and allegorical meaning in which such objects as a special species of the bamboo-reed, the fresh water crab, the crocodile and the buffalo, enter into the world of imagery. They are allegorically compared with the hero or they are the objects which serve as similes for the expression of his conduct, good or bad. The heroine in soliloquy says:

> *Let us bear with patience the injustice of the chief about whose water-ford the bamboo reeds flower like the sugar-cane.*

The meaning is that the chief is one who gives the same consideration to courtezans as he would to virtuous womanhood. The bamboo reed resembles the sugar-cane; its flowers are of the same colour and kind but it does yield the sap that the sugar-cane does. The bamboo reed signifies the courtezan; the sugar-cane the wife.[48]

Another poem in which the companion strives to convince

[46] *Lectures on Aink* (Tm), p. 2 ff.
[47] See *Lectures on Kalittokai* (Tm) *Ibid.*
[48] *Aink;* 11 ff; *Nar;* 20, 250, 360.

the heroine that her doubts and misgivings about the hero are unfounded runs thus:

Madam, why worry so much that the bangles loosen on your arm. You are worrying about one within whose land the crab hastens to its home with the corn it has gathered.

The meaning the companion wishes to convey is that the hero is as industrious as the crab, and if he tarries in returning home, it is not because of courtezans, but that he may perform with credit the tasks for which he set out.[49]

The Tamil allegory made use of Nature, the flora and fauna to the full, and deserves a separate study because of the elaborate explanations it requires. It is altogether a characteristic feature of Nature poetry in Tamil. It is not always easy to explain the allegory. Here, the commentators are very helpful, though, at times, too elaborate.

The Desert

The Tamils have the distinction of being one of those peoples in history who, while not being desert dwellers, made poetry blossom in the desert, and at times better poetry than that which the other regions inspired. In this must be seen the resource of poets who could use to their advantage the most unsuitable conditions of climate and terrain. If there are seasons in the Tamil year when most of the Tamil country is parched and presents a dreary appearance, they are the seasons of the young or tender or early spring, and the elder or aged or advanced spring. In some districts, the early spring manifests a pleasant revival of Nature's joys after the rain, and dewy season, but these are temporary manifestations.[50] If there is a period of day when the dreariness and sweltering heat is most intensified in the landscape, it is mid-day. These are the background seasons for poems on separation of lovers. The conversion of mountain and pasture-land into desert is by no means universal in the Tamil country. There will always be green spots refreshing glades, but these only heighten the

[49] *Aink;* 21. [50] See *Kali;* 32 and 36.

barrenness of the major part of the land which does not provide such amenities to the wayfarer.

The topic of love of which the desert landscape formed the background is "separation and related states". Under this head came the fears, pangs and sorrows at the thought of separation or separation *de facto*. The heroine manifesting her aversion to separation, the nurse urging on the hero to desist from his journey or to take his beloved along with him on his journey, the journey of the two lovers unknown to the heroine's parents and relatives, the search for them conducted by the mother and nurse, their bemoaning the elopement of the heroine, the fears of the two lovers themselves that the heroine's people might overtake them in their flight from home for the purpose of separating them, the observations of those that meet the lovers during the flight, are the situations of love dealt with by *paalai* poetry.[51] The ocean too was considered as *paalai*.

The course of true love was never smooth, and these sorrows so bitter to the lovers were appropriately represented by the desert. The thought of separation itself is sufficient to make the heart seem a desert. The sorrowing girl has figuratively no shade under which she might rest. Her weariness, her sigh "like the smith's bellows", her inward being, dreary and parched, found no better region than the desert to which it could be likened.

Nature as described in *paalai* contains the most lurid descriptions of dread and desolation. The sun sends its scorching rays like a cruel sovereign. The tanks and lakes are so dry that even bird and beast endure untold hardships. Trees are all so scorched by the heat that their leaves have dried or they have lost all their greenness. The *vaakai* tree with its pods adds to the luridity of the landscape. There is hardly any shade under which the weary wayfarers might rest, or hardly a puddle where they might quench their thirst. With scorching heat from above, scorching heat below their feet, scorching heat within their hearts, they look upon a prospect that is a picture of desolation.[52]

[51] *Paalai* = *Wrightia tinctoria*. See K. KOTHANDAPANI, *Vada Venkatam in Tamil Culture*, Vol. IX (1961), pp. 65-92. [52] *Akam*; 87, 89.

Every sense perceives things dreadful in the *paalai*. The heat oppresses the sense of touch, and the fire caused by the contact of bamboos in the wind sets the forest aflame. The rugged pointed stones pierce the feet like chisels. The mirage, called the "Devil's chariot" in Tamil, marks the landscape, tortures the sight with its tantalising and empty promise. The elephant and the deer wander long distances in search of the water that they cannot find. The hoot of the moping owl sounds ominous and fearful to the ears as do also the cicada and the victory drum of the *maṛavars*, the jungle-folk whose occupation is to kill the merchants and rob the caravans that pass across these forlorn tracts. The pods of *vaakai* rattle all along the way. The wayfarers smell the rotting corpses of those who have been the victims of the *maṛavars* and as the tear-drops roll down their cheeks their parched tongues hasten to absorb the tears, the only possible moisture available to them. The forest is infested with wild animals, the elephant and the cheetah that prowl about in search of what they might devour.[53]

The *paalai* poetry attracts the reader by its note of pathos and the tragic element that runs through it. One set of poems may be classified as aiming at a sympathetic interpretation of Nature by depicting the horrors of *paalai* and thus making Nature reflect the horrors of separation. The desolation in the *paalai* region is but a feeble reflection of the desolation within the hearts of lovers.

The heroine trembles at the very thought that her lover will have to traverse a dreary landscape fraught with such dangers as we have described. In one of the poems written by Avvaiyaar, the poetess, the heroine separated from her lover says how much she should love to search for him in the endless, forked paths of the forests as *Veḷḷiviiti* sought for her husband in the sea. But what type of forest is it in which she would search for him? It is one where the tiger of colours like the leaves and flowers of the *veenkai*, watching the hunger of the tigress which has just brought forth three cubs at one litter, listens with rapt attention to the masculine barking

[53] H.T., p. 8 f; p. 168 f; *Akam;* 45, 51, 55.

of distant deer. The transferred epithet is particularly pointed.[54]

Another set of poems, may be classified as aiming at literary effect by the device of contrast, a device that is most common in Tamil poetry. The poets compare the heroine at home amid the beauty of surroundings like the garden and the bower strewn with soft sand, with the horrors of the jungle and desert, the ground strewn with flints and the unbearable heat through which she will have to traverse with her lover to reach his distant country.[55] The separated hero in his solitude in the forest often thinks of what the heroine would be suffering because of his absence. Sometimes in his travel he happens to pass by a village or an oasis where Nature is lovelier, or which has transformed overnight because of some rain that has fallen, and he compares the sense of calm and quiet content in outward Nature with the desolation that is in their hearts:

> *Darkness-yet-lingering Dawn. Buffaloes are at large, swarms of bees resound around the branches of the Murukku, aflame with dense clusters of unfolding buds. Ploughmen drive their teams through the fields and into the orchards of cloddy earth; all the air with trained oxen's clear urge doth resound; and the stumpy glebe breaks beneath their furrow. The wood itself is bedecked with the bouquets on yonder trees. At this eye's festive hour, how fareth it with my beloved? Before me parted, she was in bloom; now forlorn, is such her grief that her shoulder slim? She, my beauteous brunette, with beauty spots like leaves on which hath flowed honey from cool, scented flowers, haunts of gossamer-winged bees.*[56]

This poem does not contain the "appropriate theme" of the desert, neither its flora nor fauna. However, it is conventionally classified under *paalai* because separation is its fundamental theme. In this manner under *paalai* poetry several other regions are also described. This is what Naccinaarkkiniyar would have termed "*Paalai* in *Marutam*" Among such poems which contain the descriptions of other regions but dwell on separation as their principal theme and are therefore classified as *paalai*, occur a number of poems in which the hero dis-

[54] *Akam;* 147; Compare with Kalidasa's *Ritu-Samhara,* Canto I.
[55] *Akam;* 89. [56] *Akam;* 41.

tracts the attention of the heroine, making her forget the weariness of the journey to the hero's castle by pointing to the pleasing prospect of Nature along their way.

> *Behold! Along our way there is many a hamlet, and many a fragrant cool grove where the cuckoo that feeds on the mango-flowers coos in delight . . . Rest, beloved as often as you meet with shady spots.*
>
> (*Nar*; 9)

> *Look how the elephant throws its arm around its mate and feeds her and its baby with the golden flowers of the veenkai . . . in your father's forests.*
>
> (*Nar*; 202)

> *This forest is a truly attractive one. Look at these flowers that lie scattered below the trees. The open red buds of the thorny* Murukku *which resemble the murderous nails of the swordwise-striped tiger, mixed with kongu, the punalai . . . the paatiri, white kadambu, resemble a votive shrine where lie mixed the flowers that have been used for worship. Further, behold these hills, both lofty and low, that resemble the male elephants surrounded by their mates.*
>
> (*Akam*; 99)

The mention of the heroine's father in poems like this are intended to bring home to her that they are yet within her father's realm, and that she must hasten to cross the borders of his kingdom, if her relatives are not to overtake them in their flight.

The behaviour of beast and bird in the jungle and the temporary desert, are touching manifestations of how love supports even the direst hardship, and that life together amid the hardest of circumstances is preferable to wealth and comfort obtained in single blessedness. The eleventh *Kali* ode, like several other poems, contains suggestive references. The heroine consoles herself and her companion saying that her lover did say that the country he had to traverse was fraught with danger and dread but he also added there were touching scenes to be witnessed. Seeing these sights he would, surely, hasten back to her. Says the heroine to her companion:

> *He did say that the forest would be so hot that to set foot on it would be unbearable, but he added that in the little puddle whose*

waters the baby elephants have stirred, the male elephant sees that its mate quenches its thirst before quenching its own.

He did say that the forest branches, their leaves devoid of their greenness and dried, would torture those who have bid goodbye to the pleasure of life together. But he added that in the same forest, the doves would, over their mates drooping because of the heat, overspread their wings in fond protection.

He did say that in the forest because of the sun's scorching heat the bamboos on the hills would all be withered, and it were hard for the way-farer to attain his goal. But he added that in that forest which is shadeless, the buck would so stand as to cast its shadow over the doe in fond protection against the heat.[57]

After the heroine has left her castle, the mother looks with fond regret at the places she frequented. She gazes with sorrow on the *ayalai* creeper, which the heroine planted with her own hands and watered daily, but which now has faded for want of its young gardener. She beholds with regret the *nocci* tree with leaves like the peacock's feet and flowers of dark hue, under which her daughter used to play building castles of sand, and the vast bower before the mansion which she so often frequented.[58]

The poems reporting the comments of those who see the lovers on their way to the hero's realm contain very apt observations. They see the heroine walking painfully over the stony way, and therefore say that the young man whose heart can bear to see his beloved suffer thus must be as cruel as thunder. Others look on them with compassion and understanding. A nurse inquires of a hermit chief whom she meets during her quest whether he has seen a young man and a young woman who have eloped from home as a result of their love. The hermit answers in lines that have become very familiar to lovers of Cankam Tamil:

The multi-fragrant sandal, benefits those who use it, and though born on the mountains, what benefit confers it on the mountain?

The peerless pearl benefits those who adorn themselves with it and, though born of the ocean, what benefit confers it on the ocean?

The music that comes from the seven strings, rejoices those who play on them, and though born of the lute, what benefit confers it on the lute?

[57] *Kali;* 11, 6-17. [58] *Nar;* 305.

He concludes after each strophe that such is her relationship to her daughter, and explains that she would attain her end only in marriage, and that single in her own home she would be like the sandalwood on the hill, and pearl in the unfathomed cave of ocean, and the music that lies hushed in the lute, which are of no use to man so long as they are not made available to him.[59]

[59] *Kali;* 9, 12 ff.

CHAPTER EIGHT

NATURE POETRY COMPARED

Sanskrit Poetry

A comparative study of Nature poetry in Tamil with English or European poetry, or even with Sanskrit poetry, cannot but take into account as a fundamental consideration, geographical nature as obtaining in the country where the poetry originated. In Europe, the writer has observed, even Nature has a certain aspect of sobriety and restraint. Her mountains are high and do inspire awe but they seem to soar even into dizzy heights according to an ordered plan and they seem to have been tamed by men; but the mountains of Southern India are covered with wild verdure and their physiognomy changes continually. European sunsets and sunrises are rosy or even blood-red, but the shade is always a suffused restrained red as seen in Fra Angelico's paintings or Turner's landscapes; but for prodigality of colour there is no sunset that can vie with a tropical sunset. In Europe, the landscape is sober; roses seem to bloom as they are told, not only in Germany but also in other European countries. Look at a landscape of Corot or the small patches of scenery that Raphael depicts in his earlier Madonnas and you find they have a calmness and an orderliness Tamil Naad landscapes do not possess. Here Nature's prodigality is seen in abundance, in luxuriance and in profusion. The trees, the flowers, the sunsets are a mass of colour. One poet compares the variety of flowers on Tirupparankunṛam to the colours of the eastern sky at sunrise. Everywhere there is profusion, riotous colour, abundance of life, and the reflection of Nature is seen in civilization, in poetry, and in the flamboyant saris women wear.

Since Nature is decorative and ornate in South India, South Indian art too, whether music or literature, architecture or painting, is embellished, meticulously adorned and analyzed to the last detail. The temples of South India furnish some

analogy to the poetry; tier upon tier of carved stone crowded with detail, placed one upon another to form the mighty whole, the gopuram. Similarly the Tamil poem is one connected whole. Even in the longest of the ancient poems, the entire poem forms, as if it were, one statement according to English grammar, with innumerable subordinate clauses and just one main clause to give it unity and connection. Within these subordinate clauses occur phrases, and within these phrases adjectives, and linked to these adjectives are nouns. The poet who wishes to say that the heroine was standing under a tree, would state in separate clauses or phrases the location of the tree, the kind of flowers or leaves that it bore, the bees that frequented these flowers, the colour or size of the stem, and many other details, maddening perhaps to those trained in the relative simplicity of modern English literature fostered by the English landscape, but not maddening to those who are used to the Tamil Fine Arts fostered by the Tamil landscape. Compare the Parthenon with the temple-gopurams of Conjeevaram or of Chidambaram and you will note the difference in outlook between the Greek and the Tamil.[1] As we mount further in time to classical antiquity the resemblances in literature are greater. It is easier to compare a *Kali* ode with an eclogue of Vergil than with a pastoral poem of Wordsworth. It was for want of sufficient comprehension of the difference in outlook that Ruskin erred egregiously in his judgments on Indian Art, and it was because she was endowed with that comprehension that the intellectual and sensitive critic Alice Meynell was able to appreciate it.[2]

Nothing is more natural than that there should be more

1 The writer admits the classic simplicity of Pallava art.

2 ALICE MEYNELL, *Essays*, London, 1925, p. 152 ff; Cr. C. E. ROBINSON, *Zitto Hellas*, London, 1946, p. 182: "No where can this principle be more clearly observed than in the Greek's own language—always a faithful mirror of a people's mentality. In style and structure Greek linguistic methods were a complete contrast to our own. The easy-going, loose-minded Englishman will express his ideas in a series of independent sentences ranged side by side, as it might be a row of single-room huts. The Greek preferred to build a more complex and more comprehensive edifice. Viewing a group of ideas as a logical unity, he would bring them all together into one long period in which through the subordination of clause to clause he was able to bring out explicitly the

resemblances in Nature imagery between Sanskrit and Tamil poetry and Western poetry.

Certain common climatic features as well as common flora and fauna (the mango, the jasmine, the elephant, the deer), and mutual influences, originally not of great moment, but gradually growing, are reasons for the resemblances which emerge between Tamil nature poetry and Sanskrit nature poetry. These resemblances are seen in the figures of speech drawn from nature, in the descriptions of female and male beauty, and in the mythological and folkloristic descriptions of nature, for instance, of the mountains as the breasts of Mother Earth, of the female face as the moon, or of clouds as elephants. Common attitudes are also seen in the description of the season of spring, but the basic concept and interpretation of Nature in Cankam poetry differs considerably from nature poetry in Sanskrit.

The greater part of the Ṛg Veda consists of religious lyrics, only the tenth book contains some secular poems. Arthur A. Macdonell says in his *History of Sanskrit Literature*: "The hymns of the Ṛg Veda being mainly invocations of the gods, their contents are largely mythological. It is sufficiently primitive to enable us to see clearly the process of personification by which natural phenomena developed into gods. Never observing, in his ordinary life, action or movement not caused by an acting or moving person, the Vedic Indian, like man in a much less advanced state, still refers such occurrences in Nature to personal agents, which to him are inherent in the phenomena. He still looks out upon the workings of Nature with childlike astonishment. One poet asks why the sun does not fall from the sky; another wonders where the stars go by day; while a third marvels that the waters of all rivers constantly flowing into it never fill the ocean".[3]

inter-connection between idea and idea—'a lot of little pieces of string', as the schoolboy ruefully put it, 'all tied together in one enormous knot'. But literary knots, when skilfully tied, serve a valuable purpose. By their very complexity they focus the mind of the logical interplay of ideas and it was to their precise grasp of logical relationships that the Greeks owed the unique clarity of their thought".

[3]Arthur A. Macdonell, *History of Sanskrit Literature*, p. 67, London, 1924.

In contra-distinction to these Northern conceptions of the deities and religions is the Southern conception such as has been outlined in a former chapter. The Ṛg Veda supposes a pantheon of thirty-three gods, and the elaborate mythology connected with these gods could not have been conceived by the Tamil poet who shows himself realistic and concrete. If we could assess accurately the extent to which Āryan ideas and religion affected Cankam literature, the remaining non-Āryan portion might show realism as one of its main characteristics.

Tamil concepts too were anthropomorphic, but they never revelled in the riotous imagery and personification that Āryan theogony and cosmogony supposed. The ancient Tamils did not ascribe a divine origin to their kings till Āryan imagery was introduced in a later period; they never ascribed a divine origin to their mountains and rivers till later poets, associated them with the Himālayas or the Ganges; they did not have the Vedic sacrifices and the fire-cult till they were introduced by the Āryan sacerdotal caste from the North. Their offerings to their gods were the produce of the hills, the produce of their flocks. They offered millets, the blood of rams, honey, or toddy, but anything like the literature that has grown around Soma and Agni did not grow among them.

Early Vedic literature knows nothing of the *Pūjā* ritual, namely, the offering of flowers and leaves and fruits. The ritual was in all likelihood Dravidian, and it is oft-quoted lines of the *Bhagavad-Gītā* that form the great charter for the adoption of Dravidian ritual by Vedic Brahminism.[4] "If anyone

[4] S. K. CHATTERJI, *Race Movements and Prehistoric Culture, in Vedic Age*, London, 1951, p. 160: "The characteristic offerings in the *Puja* rite, viz., flowers, leaves, fruits, water, etc., are not known to the *homa* rite, except in instances where it has been influenced by the *puja*. It has been suggested with good reason that *puja* is the pre-Aryan, in all likelihood the Dravidian form of worship, while the *homa* is the Āryan: and throughout the entire early Vedic Literature, the *puja* ritual with flowers, etc. offered to an image or symbol is unknown. The word *puja*, from a root *puj*, appears, like the thing it connotes, to be of Dravidian origin also. This word or root is not found in any Aryan or Indo-European language outside India. Professor Mark Collins suggested that the Sanskrit word *puja* (from which the root *puj* was deduced later) was

offers me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, and water, I receive that, offered in devotion by the person whose soul is disciplined."

There is no Jupiter for the early Tamils who hurls thunderbolts, though they would admit that thunder rolls like victorious drums; there is no Aeolus who strives to keep the winds in check, though they would admit that horses seem to fly like the wind and that the wind carries the fragrance of the hills; there is no Neptune who rises above the waves with the trident, though they see in the white foam the silvery air of people advanced in age.

The Sanskrit epics contain a great many references to the use of flowers and garlands, for the purpose of adorning one's person, or to decorate a festive house or city, but flowers and garlands are not used to the same extent or with the kind of significance and symbolism which the Cankam age attaches to garlands and flowers. There is a relish in epic verse in the sound of the names of trees and flowers as found in Kapilar and the *Kali* odes or in Vergil. The hundred and eight names of the sun given in the *Nalopākhyāna* and the hymn to the sun sung by Yudhiṣṭhira are indications of the delight a people inhabiting colder regions took in the sun, in the same manner the Tamils delighted in the shade.

> *Neither fire nor shelter, nor woollen clothes give greater comfort to one suffering from chilling blasts than thy rays, O Sun.*

Damayanti is asked by the ascetics whether 'she is the presiding deity of the forest, or of the mountain or stream'. She addresses a beautiful *aśoka* tree in the forest and bids it find Nala for her. The descriptions of mountains, forests and streams in the epics are full of a deep and abiding feeling for them, especially when described as the homes of ascetics and exiled princes, circumstances of which Cankam poetry is conspicuously devoid. Nature's sympathy with Sītā and Rāma in

nothing but a Dravidian *pu* "flower" plus root + *ge* "to do" (palatalized to *je*), which is found in Tamil as *chey*, in Kannada as *ge* and in Telugu as *che*. *Puja pu-ge, pu-je, pu-che* was thus a "flower ritual", a "flower service", a *pushpa-karma*, just as *homa* was described as *pasu-karma* or religious service entailing the slaughter of an animal".

distress are epic examples which were followed by later day poets all over India.[5]

In Tamil poems, the sun, the "infant sun", "the rising sun" is said to be an object of worship. Its morning and evening appearances are elaborately described by the poets, but the sun is not spoken of as "the eye of the gods" or as "the husband of dawn" in the earlier poetry.

Here is a vesper hymn connected with Saavitri:[6]

Borne by swift coursers, he will now unyoke them;
The speeding chariot he has stayed from going.
He checks the speed of them that glide like serpents;
Night has come on by Saavitri's commandment.
The weaver rolls her outstretched web together,
The skilled lay down their work in midst of toiling,
The birds all seek their nests, their shed the cattle;
Each to his lodging Saavitri disperses.

This hymn may be compared with a *neytal* or *mullai* poem which deals with nature at evening, as some illustration of both the similarity and difference in outlook of the two literatures. Though Nature is admitted to be a manifestation of God in the later evolution that Tamil religion underwent, as for example, in passages of the *Paripaaṭal* which are professedly religious, the religious allusions in the secular poetry of lover and warfare are very few. Religion does not enter into Cankam poetry to the extent it does in contemporary Greek or Latin and Sanskrit, and that is partly because the Tamils did not possess the highly developed mythology that the Greeks, the Latins and the Northern Indian poets possessed.

The Nature of Tamil poetry is just Nature associated with a Supreme Being; the Nature of Vedic and Greek and Latin poetry is a highly theological Nature divinized by man. Only the Cankam poems on Murukan and Tirumaal can offer some analogy because they are of a later age and contain evidence of growing Āryan influence. To poets who lived as a sacerdotal caste, religion was the chief subject and inspiring influence

[5] See S. B. Das Gupta, *Aspects of Indian Religious Thought*, pp. 166-188, Calcutta, 1957.

[6] A. A. Macdonell, *History*, o.c.; p. 79.

in poetry; to the Tamil poets who lived the life of the people, love, war, and ethical conduct were the commonest themes.[7]

Cankam poetry which has Nature as its sympathetic background is greater in bulk than the classical Nature poetry in Sanskrit. Kālidāsa may be taken as representative of the classical period. His dramas and *kaavyas* ought to be compared with later Tamil poetry, with epics like the *Cilappatikaaram*, the *Maṇimeekalai*, and the *Cintaamaṇi*. In time, he came two or three centuries later than the majority of Cankam poets. His exquisite use of Nature similes, the abundant use made of flowers and leaves by his characters, his feeling for mountains, the striking resemblances his Nature poetry has with Cankam Nature poetry makes one wonder if he may not have been acquainted with the ancient Tamil literature which was then the only literature besides Sanskrit and Pali available for study in India.[8] It should not have been difficult for a genius of his calibre. Besides, the lines from *Sakuntalā* (Act IV): "I am torn from my father's breast like a vine stripped from a sandal tree on the Malabar hills" sounds as if he knew the South not by reputation alone. On the other hand, his fundamental concept of Nature is more in harmony with what are exclusive features of Sanskrit poetry. There is an absence of any very great feeling for the sea. His mountains, rivers, and trees have according to Professor Ryder a "conscious individuality", a feature absent in Cankam literature.

Each canto of Kālidāsa's *Ritu-Samhāra* should be studied side by side with a few poems of the corresponding season in Cankam literature, and it will be seen how early and how far Tamil poetry advanced in its interpretation of the seasons. Kālidāsa seems young in his concept of the seasons when confronted with the Cankam poets. The poem is accepted by critics as a juvenile effort of the poet, and if the poem is considered here at all, it is only as illustration of the difference in outlook.

[7] On the differences between Aryan and Dravidian religions, see P. T. SRINIVAS IYENGAR, *Pre-Aryan Tamil Culture, passim* and H.T., pp. 102-115.

[8] The erotic poetry of Hala in Prakrit does not use Nature as a regional background. See SUSHIL KUMAR DE, *Ancient Indian Erotics and Erotic Literature*, Calcutta, 1959.

Kālidāsa describes the seasons and the landscape of the seasons, but the seasons have not become symbolic in him of the varied stages of love and the different emotional experiences of lovers.[9] He is intent only on union and separation. Yet some of the details of his landscapes are similar to those of the Tamil poets for this reason that climatic conditions in Central India are similar in certain respects to those obtaining in Tamil Naad. But the resurrection of Nature and the newness of life that Kālidāsa describes in his canto on Spring are not applicable to the Southern country.

Here are lines from his first canto on Summer, and these may be compared with the Tamil poems on the *paalai* region:

> *Travellers, whose hearts are scorched by the fire of separation from their sweethearts, cannot even look at the earth wherein columns of dust are raised by unbearable gusts (of wind) (and) which is heated by the blaze of the fierce sun.*
>
> *Exceedingly scorched by the fierce sunshine, their palates dried up by great thirst, the beasts have started off to another forest.*
>
> *Greatly scorched by the rays of the sun, a herd of wild boars are as it were entering the earth, digging by means of rows of long-stretching snouts a pond wherein the mud has dried up and (only) the bhadra musta grass remains.*
>
> *All birds are panting, sitting on trees whose leaves have fallen off; troops of fatigued monkeys are resorting to mountain-caverns.*
>
> *Everywhere the ground has been burnt by the wild fire . . . The conflagration starting on the skirts torments all beasts; increasing with the wind it burns in the mountain valleys; it breaks forth with sharp noises in places abounding with dry bamboos, growing strong in a moment it spreads in the grass.*
>
> *Elephants, oxen and lions, their bodies scorched together by fire have flocked together like friends . . . they rest by a river with broad sandy banks.*

The following lines on the season of "Rains" are reminiscent of the Cankam poets:

> *Women are going, the ground on their way being shown by flashes of lightning.*

[9] SRI AUROBINDO, *Kalidasa*, Calcutta, 1929, p. 36: "He fell back on the life of sensuous passion with images of which, no doubt, his ungoverned youth was most familiar."

9

The wives of people who are away from home are in despair sprinkling, with the drops of water from their lotus-like eyes, their bimba-like lower lips resembling beautiful leaves, and leaving off ornaments and cosmetics.

(*Canto* II)

The first few lines of the fourth canto where the disuse of cosmetics and ornaments during the cold season is mentioned reminds us of similar lines in the *Neṭunalvaaṭai.*[10]

Kālidāsa's *Meghadūta,* however, is the work of the full-blown poet. Taking an idea from Vālmīki, Kālidāsa makes the cloud the messenger of a Yakṣa forcefully separated from his wife, to carry to his beloved some words of solace. Kālidāsa himself felt that objection might be taken to the incongruity of making an inanimate object the medium of his message, for with the fifth verse he seems to arm himself against would-be critics. "What possible connection," he says, "can there be between a cloud which consists of smoke, light, water, and wind, and messages which can be carried by creatures endowed with sound organs of sense? Unmindful of this, through eagerness, the Yakṣa requested the cloud; for love-smitten persons are naturally incapable of distinguishing between animate and inanimate things". There are apostrophes to the cloud, the moon, the ocean, the sun, the wind, and the bee in Cankam literature, but they are brief and to the point such as lovers might exclaim in agony.

Heroines in their grief cry:

Ocean . . . thy wail is heard even at dead of night. Who is the cause of thy grief? (By whom hast thou been abandoned?).

(*Kur;* 163)

Sun, thou that sharest not thy rays with another . . . if thou wilt search for him and deliver him into my hands, this fire that burns, with my life as wick and my heart as lamp, will be extinguished . . .

(To the setting Sun)

Immaculate Fire! till thou dost rise again over the brim of the ocean, lend me a few rays that with their light I may search for him.

(*Kali;* 142)

[10] *Ritusamhara* edited by R. S. Pandit, Bombay, 1942; edited by M. A. Male, Bombay, 1916.

(To the hare that is supposed to be in the moon)

> *Hare that from the moon dost survey the dark ocean-fringed earth, thou wilt show me where my beloved is. If thou dost not, I shall urge on thee thy enemy hounds, or inform the hunters of thy dwelling-place.*
>
> (*Kali;* 144)

Kālidāsa is one of the greatest of Nature poets of India. His preference is for placid landscapes and serene lakes and forests.

Greek and Latin Poetry

The Cankam poets have many more points of contact with Greek and Latin authors than with European poets of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It is in no way surprising since long periods of time in the world's history seem to bring about changes also in the world's poetic interpretation of Nature. At first, in the childhood of a race, there is a child-like and simple appreciation of Nature. Later as the race grows to manhood, and advancing civilization creates city-life and an interest in man, Nature is relegated to a background. A third stage then comes when an over-civilized people seek comfort and solace and calm repose in Nature. A quotation from Vinet which occurs in Shairp's *Poetic Interpretation of Nature* is particularly revealing:

> The more the soul has been cultivated by social intercourse, and especially the more it has suffered from it, the more, in short, society is disturbed and agonized, the more rich and profound Nature becomes—mysteriously eloquent for the one who comes to her from out the ardent and tumultuous centre of civilization.[11]

This probably explains the modern view of Nature that has been popular in the world since the time of Rousseau, Göethe and Wordsworth. What a vast difference there is in the concept and interpretation of Nature, say, between Vergil and Wordsworth, between Paraṇar and Subrahmania Bharati.

Homer, Hesiod and Theocritus are older than the Cankam

11 J. C. Shairp, *Poetic Interpretation of Nature,* o.c.; p. 236.

poets. Though they all have the same loving observation of Nature, their interpretation of Nature is not as advanced or stylized as the interpretation of the Tamil poets. As an epic poet, Homer is concerned with quick action and has no time for detailed description of landscape, but nevertheless Nature is the framework within which his heroes move. Ruskin has been criticized for his statement that "every Homeric landscape, intended to be beautiful, is composed of a fountain, a meadow and a shady grove". While not denying the beauty of the Nature similes and feeling for Nature both in the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad,* one is not surprised that a Grecian poet is not exuberant in the description of landscape, because Nature in Greece, though beautiful, is never so exuberant as in the tropics. There is as much difference between the austere simplicity of a Homeric landscape and a Cankam landscape, as there is between the blue cloudless sky over Athens and a tropical sunset.[12]

There is a delicate feeling for streams and fountains in Greek poetry which is not so pronounced in Tamil poetry. Then there is also the mythological colouring of Nature, so much a part of Greek and Latin poetry, which is absent in Tamil poetry. The Tamils had no gods of Nature like Dionysius, Hermes and Pan. They did personify the Earth, but the reverence never developed into such a cult as when Aeschylus says:

> *Before all other gods to Earth I call in prayer.*
>
> (*Eumenides,* 1.f.)

When the Greek viewed a rapid torrent, a stream, a fountain, or a line of high cliffs, he saw behind them an animate, divine spirit. Woods and hills, meadows and brooks, trees and branches, were peopled with divine forms of greater or lesser importance in the world of gods. The Tamils too people their glades, mountain tops and copses with godlings and spirits.

[12] On Nature in Greek and Latin poetry see also H. R. FAIRCLOUGH, *Love of Nature among the Greeks and Romans,* New York, 1930; G. SOUTAR, *Nature in Greek Poetry,* London, 1939; W. F. JACKSON KNIGHT, *Roman Vergil,* London, 1943.

Vergil, Horace and Lucretius were more or less contemporaries of the Cankam poets. They appeared at a time when Rome had reached the peak of civilization, but their feeling for Nature runs through European poetry to this day. The Romans never ceased to be a country-loving people, and the cult of the country and the country villa so popular among the Romans has no apparent parallel in the Tamil country.

The Tamils were also great lovers of towns and cities. The description of South Indian sea-ports and inland capitals as detailed in the Tamil classics reveal town-planning on an extensive scale, with due attention to streets, to parks, to division into quarters, and to the general beauty and architecture of buildings, the prominent ones among which were convents of seven storeys. I wonder if in any other literature a city is used as the term of comparison for a lady, but such a simile is very common in ancient Tamil literature. When a poet wished to express the abundance and resource of joy and pleasure that a man derives from the woman whom he has married, or whom he wishes to marry, he can think of no better simile than a city which in its own way is full of abundance and resource, and where every sense may be gratified. A city was also the symbol of beauty, and hence the beauty of woman was also compared to the beauty of a city.

"Rich and resourceful is she like New York of the Americans", or "Meet me with all your virtues, London-like," may sound very strange to modern ears, but that is exactly what the ancient Tamil poets said with Tamil cities and towns as their terms of comparison. They chose cities and towns of historical importance or cities and towns which were prosperous and of greatest profit to king and people, and often the mention of a town of a certain kingdom was a graceful manner of paying a compliment to its sovereign. Women are often said to be as pretty or as resourceful—

as the cool Kutavaayil
(*Akam* 44)

as Allur of paddy wealth
(*Akam* 46)

as Tonti of the Ceera king.
(*Akam* 60)

"Meet me", says a lover, "with your several *Tonṭi-like* virtues", Tonṭi, being the great sea-port on the West Coast, the Tyndis of Ptolemy.[13] Thus nearly every famous town or city of old has been pressed into service as term of comparison in a lover's language. The Tamils, therefore, idealized city life, but their love of cities interfered in no way with their love of Nature.

Relief from the sameness of city life was provided for the Tamils by the festivals and water sports on sea and river, and pilgrimages to shrines located in spots of natural beauty, for Tamil religion, as we have seen, was engendered by the love of Nature, and at the time spread love for that from which it originated.

Lucretius is eminently a philosopher but has occasionally intimated flashes and awe-inspiring landscapes to portray. Horace, said to be essentially a townsman, has many a line in praise of the country and his favourite rural haunts. But it is Vergil who ranks as the unfailing source of Nature poetry. He describes Nature, loves Nature, and sympathizes with Nature. To compare him with the Cankam poets is not too easy. The Cankam poets are conventional too as Vergil is conventional and imitates Theocritus in his Eclogues; they describe country life too but never so directly and so extensively as Vergil does in the Georgics. However, the same desire for accuracy, the same spirit of minute description and the same feeling for the manifestations of Nature occur all through Cankam literature. The long passages of regional description, for instance, in *Malipaṭukaṭaam* may be profitably compared with a Georgic or two:

> This is the nature of the land (you have to traverse). The seeds that have been left on the earth grow by themselves just as the inhabitants would desire them to grow because of the torrential rain from clouds ripped open by lightning. In the spacious open grounds where there is abundant rain is the slender *mucuntai* creeper. It bears white blossoms which shine like the pleiads in the broad firmament. The sesamum that grows from the fields has pods like blue sapphires. In the adjoining forests dotted with ponds like waterpots, the pods

[13] *Aink;* 175. Cfr. K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, *The Chronology of the Early Tamils*, o.c., p. 98.

do not turn red since they receive rain. They mature and become black, and turn so thick that a hand would not be able to hold more than seven of them. The seeds yield abundant oil. The *panicum* whose ears intertwine like the trunks of baby elephants that fight in sport is ready to be harvested. On their stubbles, the *avarai* with its sickle-shaped fruits, sheds its white flowers that resemble drops of curdled milk.[14]

Besides the tender similes and the long descriptions of Nature's scenes in the Aeneid, Vergil has a few passages where he shows that early in the life of Europe he apprehended a sense of sympathy between man and Nature. In the sixth book, the earth trembles and the mountains quake as if in dread of the approach of the Sibyl, and in the fourth book there is maintained throughout "a fine sympathy between the aspects of the outer-world and the passions which agitate the human actors". It is thus that he sets off the agitation within Dido's heart in contrast with the calm and silence of night:

> Night fell; weary creatures took quiet slumber all over earth, and woodland and wild waters had sunk to rest; now the stars wheel midway on their gliding path, now all the country is silent, and beasts and gay birds that haunt liquid levels of lake or thorny rustic thicket lay couched asleep under the still night. But not so the distressed Phoenician, nor does she ever sink asleep or take the night upon eyes or breast; her pain redoubles, and her love swells to renewed madness, as she tosses on the strong tide of wrath. (*Aeneid,* IV. 521-531).

Effect by contrast as Vergil uses is one of the commonest devices in Cankam poetry by which Nature is the sympathetic stage and theatre for man.

The Greeks and Romans too were noted for their love of leaves and flowers as the Tamils were, though they did not put them to such a variety of uses in daily life. Their shepherds too decked their heads with chaplets of leaves and flowers:

> Just apart lay the garlands slid from his head, and the heavy wine jar hung by its own worn handle.
>
> (Ec. VI)

[14] *Malaipatu;* 11. 99-110.

> Shepherds of Arcady, deck with ivy your rising poet, that Codrus may burst his gall with envy; or if he praise beyond my meed, bind my brows with foxglove, lest an evil tongue harm the bard to be.
> Alcides takes most delight in the poplar, Iacchus in the wine, fair Venus in the myrtle, Phoebus in his own bay tree; Phyllis loves hazels: While Phyllis loves them, neither shall myrtle excel the hazels, nor Phoebus bay.
>
> (Ec. VII)

Catullus, writer of Latin love-poetry, addressed his love, Lesbia, directly and was bound by no poetic convention. It is impossible to know of the personal feelings of the Tamil poets except in their *puṛam* poetry. Even in *puṛam* some of the poems partake of the nature of "group-poetry" and give little room for the personal note.[15] We shall never know whether Kapilar and Paraṇar are writing their own experiences or exercising their powers of imagination and dramatization in their love-lyrics. We shall never know directly from poetry the name of a single lover of the Cankam age, for conventions forbade any indication by which the actors of the drama of love might be identified. One misses in Cankam poetry the direct, intimate, personal addresses to Nature and to lovers, and the descriptions of Nature, pure and simple, that one finds in the poetry of other epochs and other nations. Cankam poetics has given the world some of its best and singular Nature Poetry, but it also appears to have restricted and limited poetic inspiration to a certain extent.

English Poetry

The Vergilian tradition in the poetic interpretation of Nature runs through the English Literature that followed the Renaissance.[16] Chaucer and Spencer have the May-morning freshness of a new literature, but it is Shakespeare who attracts us in our comparative study, for as a dramatist he used

[15] T. P. MEENAKSHISUNDARAM, *The Theory of Cankam Poetry, in Tamil Culture,* Vol. I, No. I, p. 41.

[16] J. INGRAM BRYANT, *The Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry,* Tokyo, 1932; F. W. MOORMAN, *The Interpretation of Nature in English Poetry from Beowulf to Shakespeare,* pp. 215-239, Strassburg, 1915.

Nature for "situations", to augment happiness or to increase the tragic note.

The European seasons had been already made to signify, since classical times, analogous changes in man. Spring would stand for youth or rejuvenation, as autumn would signify decay. The Western poets found change and variety in the cycle of the seasons, and anthologies of European poetry could be made under the headings of spring, summer, autumn and winter as anthologies of Tamil poetry could be made under the headings of the five regions. The variety and change that poetry would welcome in the outward face of Nature is not effected by the six seasons of Tamil Naad. Differences there are between the rainy season and the warm summer, but compared with the differences that exist between summer and winter in Europe, our variety here in Tamil Naad is by no means pronounced. In the absence of snow and ice, we lack the chief characteristics of a changing landscape. But the Tamils were equal to this challenge of Nature. The variety and change they did not find in the seasons, they found in landscape. Hence they made landscape the fundamental basis for division and variety, and subordinated the change in the seasons to the difference in landscape. Where European poetry took inspiration from the pageant of the seasons, Tamil poetry based itself on the regions.

The same fundamental idea of making Nature illuminate poetic thought is found in Shakespeare as in the Tamil poets. In *Macbeth,* for instance, storm reigns supreme. Thunder and lightning are the fitting accompaniments of the witches whenever they make their appearance, while, as in *Julius Caesar,* murder is portended by a night of elemental fury and by evil omens.

The obscure bird clamoured the livelong night.
(*Macbeth;* II, 3)

There is the idea of contrast when King Duncan appears with his retinue and finds every aspect pleasing, little aware of what will befall him that night:

This castle has a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

Banquo replies:

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
By his loved mansionry that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here.

(Act. I. Sec. VI)

The storm in *King Lear* is as impressive, and is brought into close relation with human action and with the tempest which rages in the breast of the aged king. It is thus that the Tamil poets portray the desolation of lovers at separation with the background of the desolation during the season of excessive heat, and with the suffering of humanity as in *Neṭunalvaaṭai.*

After Shakespeare, James Thompson deserves mention in a comparative study, not because of the intrinsic worth of his poem *The Seasons,* but because of the idea that he conceived of making the seasons the subject of so many hundreds of lines of poetry. After Pope and Pope's recall to man, Thompson affirmed a return to Nature. He wrote from a loving and detailed observation of Nature and described every aspect of the seasons, the trees, the flowers and the animals. Spring, he made symbolic of pure love which he calls "the passion of the groves".

Lend me your song, ye nightingales! oh pour
The mazy running soul of melody
Into my varied verse! While I deduce
From the first note the hollow cuckoo sings,
The symphony of Spring, and touch a theme
Unknown to fame—the passion of the groves.

(Spring, 576-581)

Summer gave him the opportunity to sing the praises of Philosophy; in Autumn, he sang the praises of a philosophical country life, and in Winter he saw a temporary death all around so that it reminded him of the deathless lot of man.

Thompson is a describer in detail, and in certain passages he is an enumerator. There is no relation in his poems to life as depicted in the Tamil poets. Thompson, however, essayed to learn from Nature and to philosophize from its appearances, as the Tamil poets did. With the Tamil poets such ethical and philosophic observations are just briefly alluded as is natural to a literature long used to them. In Thompson, they seem new and sometimes laboured like the moralist searching for lessons in Nature, not just noting what he could not but see.

Scotland nursed many genuine poets of Nature, and irregular, wild and mountainous country as it is, it bred many a poet with a feeling for montane Nature. Among them Burns has a foremost place, and he is interesting to us because of the manner in which he gave man the first place, and Nature, the second place, and the mode in which he wove Nature and lovers. "Always Nature was second, humanity first—the background, sometimes used like a theatrical property for the human act and passion he sung."[17] "Theatrical property" is a suitable phrase to describe also the Cankam concept of Nature provided we understand it as a moving, living, feeling "theatrical property".

Gray in his *Elegy* and Collins in his *Ode to Evening*, exemplify in some manner the sympathetic interpretation of Nature, but it is in Wordsworth, as Stopford Brooke points out, that Naturalism reached its culmination. The Greek and Latin poets when they wished to address the objects of Nature, often addressed the gods who were supposed to be their guardians. The Tamil poets made an advance when they addressed the objects and not the gods of those objects, as when under the influence of love and grief a heroine asks of the ocean why it wails, by whom it has been left abandoned. But Wordsworth strikes a new note in his line:

The Mighty Being is awake.

Nature was represented in Greek and Latin poetry as the platform on which the drama of man was enacted. In Tamil

[17] STOPFORD A. BROOKE, *Naturalism in English Poetry*, London, 1920, p. 130.

poetry it was the sympathetic scenery portrayed to match the drama of life. The scenery was changed to keep in harmony with the human sentiments that were dramatized. But in Wordsworth it became a subject apart from human nature, loved for itself alone, and conceived as a personality having a universal life and able to communicate with us. Wordsworth conceived Nature as a Mighty Being. Every object of Nature, the hills, the trees, the tarns, the crags, the wild cataract, the evening star, palpitated with a life. He attributed a consciousness and a soul to everyone of them but he also attributed a One Soul, co-ordinating and unifying all of them.[18]

Thou Being that art in the clouds and air
Thou that art in the green and in the groves—

.. ..

Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean, and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of men:
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things.

He embodies his idea of an infinite spirit in the Universe in the shape of a personality whom he creates and calls Nature.

There are those who think that the ancient view of Nature as the stage scenery for mankind was real, and that the modern view after Wordsworth is unreal. But, it cannot be denied that Wordsworth originated a new epoch and made a positive contribution to the interpretation of Nature.[19]

One is surprised that the ancient Tamil poets never had their poetry influenced by their religious beliefs in the all-pervading presence of a Mighty Being.

The *Paripaaṭal* ode already quoted has these lines:

Of the fire, thou art the heat; of the flower,
thou art the fragrance;

[18] NORMAN LACEY, *Wordsworth's View of Nature*, Cambridge, 1943.

[19] J. W. BEACH, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth Century English Poetry*, New York, 1936, pp. 158-251.

Of the stone, thou art the lustre: of the word,
thou art the truth;
In virtue, thou art the sweetness; in vigour
thou art the strength;
Of the Vedas, thou art the Arcanum; of the
elements, thou art the Source;
Of the sun, thou art the effulgence; of the
moon thou art the grace;
Thou art All, and the essence of All thou art.[20]

Similarly the *Bhagavad-Gītā* has these lines:

Of creations the beginning and the ending,
and also the middle am I, O Arjuna. Of
Sciences, the science concerning the SELF;
the speech of orators I . . .

And whatsoever is the seed of all beings, that am I,
O Arjuna; nor is there aught, moving or unmoving,
that may exist bereft of Me . . .

Whatsoever is glorious, good, beautiful, and mighty,
understand thou that to go forth from a fragment of
My splendour.[21]

The sentiments these Tamil and Sanskrit lines express were confined to devotion; they did not influence the secular poetry of the Tamils, nor did they cause the introduction of new trends in their interpretation of Nature during the Classical Period.

20 *Paripaatal*, 3, 63 ff.
21 *Bhagavad-Gita*, Tenth discourse.

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